

- **Nell Quesenberg Report**

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BILLY WAYNE SMITH

By Nell Quesenberg

The main gift that Nathan Smith gave to his son, Billy Wayne, was the belief that the world is without boundaries: “You can become what you want to be.”

Autumn, 1956

It was midnight. The large ship, whose engines had been shuttering alive, began to cut through the deep San Francisco Bay.

Under the silvery moon, as the harbor lights from the bay’s shore grew dim, the ship entered Golden Gate Channel. Quickly, she passed under the magnificent Golden Gate Bridge that had been built almost twenty years earlier.

Now well out into the Pacific Ocean, the troop carrier Colbey Victory set her course firmly, at fifteen knots per hour. Her destination, ten thousand miles away, was Yokohama Bay in Japan, “The Land of the Rising Sun.”

The tall, slender youth standing at the ship’s rail was Billy Wayne Smith of Powell’s Valley, Tennessee. He had joined the Army for a three-year period, upon graduating from high school in the early summer of this year. Just now, the boy’s unusually handsome face, looking back toward the shore, was solemn, his young, steady blue eyes lost in thought.

Memories of the creeks, the rivers and the beautiful hills of home were mingling in his mind. He thought of his parents, Nathan and Alice, his many relatives and friends, and the little church, Shady Grove, where he belonged.

Eleven years had passed since for the first time in the islands of Japan's history, that they had been occupied by a foreign power. Before World War II, the Japanese people had been ruled by a small superior ruling class. Under this rule, the nation had made unprecedented advancements. Following Japan's surrender, General MacArthur ordered the introduction of political and economic democracy. Under this new form of government, the Japanese continued gaining the world's markets in a remarkable fashion.

Since the war, the old bombed-out Ford plant and other badly damaged buildings had either been repaired or demolished. New high-rise buildings were springing up everywhere. These plain, rectangular edifices were designed by men whose architecture strove to erase all order of classes among men, hence causing every modern city on earth to look the same.

Another great leveling influence were the sounds coming out of the Grand Cherry and other clubs on the night strips in Yokohama. Oriental girls in occidental dress were busy laughing with the fine-looking round-eyed American soldiers and dancing lively to the rock and roll music.

Yet, a little past the city, silently rising two and one half miles above the sea level, perpetually blanketed with snow, was Mt. Fujiyama, "The Peerless." Mt. Fuji promised forever, a sameness to this lovely Asian island.

Here, near Yokohama Bay, at the 229th Ordinance Base, Billy Wayne spent most of the next three years. His job was seeing that vehicle and heavy equipment parts were sent to proper places in Korea and other parts of Japan.

He liked the Japanese people, finding them friendly and hospitable. Only in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where atomic bombs had been dropped in early August, 1945, did Billy Wayne find the Japanese people coolly reserved toward Americans.

Spring, 1959

Deeply calm, as was his usual demeanor, his face had matured into lines of fine, strong manhood. But for the rest of his life, his friends would watch for that frequently breaking, radiant smile to come across his face.

When Billy Wayne left home, three years earlier, the beautiful American girls were wearing their hair feathered and ballerina shoes. Upon his return, the girls' shoes were not pointed, their hair was becoming quite bouffant.

On the national scene, Jack Kennedy was hot in his pursuit of becoming the United States' first Catholic president. The job market was still depressed. Billy Wayne went out on trips with his friend, Bob Cheek, and learned to become a truck driver. Billy Wayne followed trucking for the next ten years.

"Tell me how you met Daddy?" asked Cathy Smith, the lovely sixteen-year-old daughter of Billy Wayne and Patty Smith.

"Well," said Patty, "I first saw Billy Wayne just after he came out of the Army at a Forge Ridge basketball game. I thought he was the best-looking man I'd ever seen."

"Our cousins arranged a date for us. Your daddy was certainly a gentleman, Cathy."

Billy Wayne was to learn that Patty was a deeply religious girl whose family attended the Gap Creek Church. She was the daughter of Haynes and Bessie Chumley of Patterson Crossroads, Harrogate, Tennessee. Patty's beautiful eyes, set in a sweetly molded little face, had the brightest twinkle that Billy Wayne had ever seen.

Deciding Billy Wayne would make a wonderful Christmas present for herself, Patty picked Christmas Eve, 1960, for them to marry. Their first child, Robert Ray, named after Bob Cheek, was born on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1963. Cathy Diane, the child with the lovely dark hair and blue eyes, that so favors her father, was born on February 21, 1965.

The Smiths have always had at least five dogs living with them. Billy Wayne has a marked weakness toward homeless animals. His favorite dog is McIntosh, a Scottie that he bought a few years ago.

In his mother Alice's house are two small glass Scotties, sitting on her window sill. Billy Wayne bought these two candy-filled dogs as a child. From that time on, he always nurtured the dream of owning a real Scottie.

Early 1969, Billy Wayne had taken two tests. The first was to become a Roadway truck driver. The second test he sought was for employment with the Tennessee Department of Safety as a highway patrolman.

Both Roadway and the Tennessee Department of Safety accepted Billy Wayne.

He remembers with pride that TBI agent John Markum stated privately that Billy Wayne Smith had one of the best character references that he's ever investigated.

Billy Wayne was shot his first year as a state trooper in 1969. The bullet didn't work out of his leg muscle, until his father, Nathan, lay dying in 1973.

Nathan, a carpenter, had been hired to repair the roof on the big rock "Hughes" house across from the courthouse. This old landmark is now owned by Joe Buis.

The hammer mashed down upon Nathan's finger. He thought, "That was a bad lick," looking quickly at his finger to see the damage.

It was a bad lick because Nathan's finger wouldn't heal. He used every homemade remedy that he knew. Still the finger grew worse.

Alice and Billy Wayne tried to get him to go to the doctor. Instead, Nathan began wrapping his finger so that they couldn't see it. Everyone grew more worried.

Finally, Patty, whom Nathan loved dearly, asked him to go see a doctor. For her, he went.

Dr. Meredith Evans took the end of Nathan's finger off that day. He told Nathan he felt sure it was cancerous.

Later, the doctor took a lymph node from under Nathan's arm. Operating further would not help. The cancer was the fast, militant kind. Nathan might live two more years.

But Nathan didn't return home to die. He returned home to live. Pained, his family watched his brave struggle. Then the time of Nathan's death drew near.

Alice stayed with him, never leaving his side the sixty-three days that it took him to die in Claiborne County Hospital.

Billy Wayne and Patty stayed with him as much as they could and still keep their jobs. Sometimes Nathan would beg Patty not to leave. Those days she'd be very late returning from her lunch hour to her work as school aide. She was grateful that school superintendent Clay Neely never said a word to her about being late.

During the day Nathan's hospital room was filled with people that loved him. Besides being a good and kind neighbor, Nathan always made people feel better with his laughter, fiddling and dancing.

Nathan died October 7, 1973.

In 1980, Billy Wayne, an immensely popular man with the people, won the sheriff's office of Claiborne County.

That night, many people came to his house to celebrate his victory. He put his arms around Alice and Patty. In his mind, he was thinking of Nathan.

Billy Wayne was thankful that Nathan had taught him, "You can become what you want to be." How he wished that strong old Republican was here tonight to know that he'd become a sheriff.