

Bob's Early Life

Robert Lee Slaughter was born April 19, 1922 in Littleton Colorado.



I knew little about my father's early childhood. The couple of things I did know was that he grew up on a farm and dropped out of school in the 8th grade; which didn't keep him from scoring 140 on his IQ test given by the Army.

I also knew he had a strained relationship with his parents, especially his biological father. According to Bob, in his father's eyes, he couldn't do anything right and his mother was a cold, callus, angry person. Of

course, that wasn't my experience with my American grandmother; she was affectionate and tried to protect us, many years ago. I wanted to see her again. She knew things I needed answers to.

In the summer of 1975, when I was 24, I drove to Colorado, where she still lived. I was more than ready to find out everything I could about my father. I wanted her to help me make sense of the nightmare we four children lived from 1959 to 1963.

When I arrived at Grandma's front door, she was overjoyed to see me but didn't seem surprised. We gave each other the same bear hugs we gave each other back in 1960. She held me at arm's distance and said, "I knew you'd be back," then gave me another bear hug.

It was uncomfortable sitting on the same couch that I sat on fifteen years earlier. Seeing my grandmother's smiling face triggered memories I had been trying to forget; memories of the four forever years my siblings and I spent with our father after being abducted by him in 1959. He took us from our mother's safe and loving home in the Philippines, to come to a strange land, America, where our lives were turned upside down.



Grandma was ready and willing to answer all my questions. It felt like she had been waiting for me to ask for a long time. I started by asking about St Clara's; the orphanage that Bob left us at for several months. It was a horrible place where the nuns were cruel. Grandma told me it had been torn down in the late 60's. That was for the best. St Clara's had been housing homeless children since the 1890's. The children there had no one to tell when they were scared or being mistreated. They were insignificant Orphans. This was only one of the many places we lived during the four lost years.

I asked Grandma to tell me about Bob's childhood. Why didn't Bob understand what he did to us was wrong on so many levels? Didn't he realize he was ruining the lives of his children? Didn't he care?



Grandma said she never understood her second son; he was capable of being furious one moment then completely charming the next. He was difficult from the time he was born, she told me. Grandma said growing up, he kept to himself and had few friends.

There was one story Grandma told me that I found revealing. It gave me a small window into my father's psyche as a boy. It was around 1930, when Bob was about eight years old. One night Grandma leaned out

the kitchen door and called him in for dinner. He had been in the backyard all day and into the evening, arranging something in the dirt. He had a large tin box filled with little green army men along with assorted small cars, trucks, and plastic animals that he had collected.

Grandma called again but when Bob didn't answer, she went outback to get him. Bob had built a miniature battlefield that covered half the back yard, complete with trees, hills, fences, and roads. She was amazed at how meticulously he arranged every detail, leaving nothing out. The farm animals were in fenced pastures, cars were strategically placed on well-defined roads and each soldier looked ready for battle.

Bob was so absorbed in what he was doing he didn't hear his mother calling. Lying on his stomach he was placing each piece with such precision. After watching him for a few minutes, Grandma tapped his foot to get his attention. This startled Bob as he whipped his head back to look up at her. His mother complimented him on what a great job he had done.



At that, Bob jumped up and without saying a word began kicking the battlefield over and over until it was nothing but a pile of dirt and rocks mixed with little green army men. Grandma was so shocked, she was speechless. Then without a word Bob ran into the house. Later Grandma asked him why he ruined his fort after working on it all day. He answered, "Because I felt like it."

My grandma said she never understood Bob. One minute he'd be quietly reading then for no apparent reason, he'd slam doors in anger. What surprised me most about what Grandma told me, was Bob having no friends and being a loner as a child. The man I knew didn't match this description at all; as a matter of

fact, I knew him to be the complete opposite. Bob was what you'd call a room full. Wherever Bob went, he became the center of attention, by design. He talked, backslapped, and laughed more than anyone I've ever known. He was smart, engaging, and always had an audience. When in a restaurant he'd invite strangers to join us. He talked to anyone that would listen to his stories, usually inflated to make them more captivating. He was an expert at turning fantasy into fact at a moment's notice and strangers bought it hook, line, and sinker. He'd always end up getting something monetary from them. He was a *grifter*.

My grandmother admitted she wasn't the affectionate type as a young woman because it wasn't how she was raised. She never wanted children but with no birth control, it happened. Many young women who didn't want children were left with little choice but to keep their child or give them up for adoption. Heaven forbid they'd end up at St Clara's.

My grandma was born Phyllis McKay in 1899. She was pure Scottish. In her parent's day, children were seen and not heard and I wondered if that played into my father's need for attention. Phyllis was ambitious; a woman before her time. She told me she had an abortion in 1919 which almost killed her. It was difficult for independent women in the early 1900's and motherhood wasn't something that came natural to grandmother.

I told Grandma that Roe vs Wade had just become law. Phyllis lit up when we talked about how far women had come from when she grew up; a time when a woman wasn't allowed to vote much less choose family size. Grandma said all she ever wanted was a job, the ability to support herself, and to spend her money the way she wanted. I know many women today that want exactly what Phyllis wanted. Nothing has really changed. Women wanted and still want the same rights men have.

I asked Grandma about the time we stayed with her after we were taken. She got quiet and hung her head. Grandma wished she could have done more, but her hands were tied. I cried when she told me my mother was so close to finding us the first year we were kidnapped. When we left Grandma's house and moved into an apartment, she lost track of us after her one visit to the apartment. When she went back the following



week, like she promised, we were gone. After many phone calls, she found out we were at St. Clara's Orphanage. She sent a telegram to my mother immediately. It took weeks to get the paperwork that Grandma needed in order to accompany the authorities to the orphanage. Mom had sent proof that we were her children, but we were long gone and the nuns refused to give out any information. The nuns at St Clara's must have believed Bob's lies. By the time Mother Superior was convinced, we were in another state with no address. It would be another three long years before we were found.

After my visit with my grandmother I felt it was time to confront Bob on specific questions without fear of retaliation. I was no longer under his control or afraid. I deserved answers.

Bob was a pathological liar. He lied so much he couldn't discern between what was true and what wasn't. When you believe your own lies, it's easy to look someone in the eye and convince them too. He had a way of twisting the smallest piece of truthful information into a narrative that suited him. In his mind, if one percent of the story rang true, then everything following must also be true.

I know I sound cynical, but as a young adult I wanted answers to the four forever years. I repressed those memories for a long time, but I was ready to demand an explanation from Bob. Pretending those four years didn't happen wasn't working for me anymore.

Shortly after my return from Colorado, I learned from Valorie, my sister, that Bob was seriously ill. He had cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and had lost his eyesight. I knew confronting him had to happen soon. The truth from Bob was vital to my mental health and therefore my life.

Bob died December 17, 1974 in San Francisco of a massive coronary. He was 51 years old.

His untimely death took with him the answers to my burning questions. Why did he take us? Where did he go when he left us at St. Clara's? Why did he say Mom died? I wanted him to apologize for abusing me and ask him why. These were just a few of the unanswered questions he took to his grave. I waited too long and now my only consolation was to believe his answers would have been lies too.

Any one of a dozen situations could have changed my life. If the Navy took Bob instead of the Army. If he hadn't injured his leg, he wouldn't have been sent to the hospital in Cebu City, where my mother lived. If he didn't happen to be on the same Jeepney (public transportation in the Philippines) that my mother happened to get on they never would have met.

I find it remarkable how a slight shift in events can change the course of one's life; like in the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*.

In spite of my unanswered questions, I have a wonderful life.