

MA HANEY'S LITTLE SECRET DIDN'T ADD UP

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Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN
Sunday, 26 February 2012, pg. C-4
'Writer's Corner'

Ma Haney died the other day on Saint Patrick's Day. The date seems ironic, I guess; she had plenty of Irish in her since her maiden name was Medley. She always said that she would outlive all her kids. I guess she did, losing one daughter in the 80s, the other three girls at the turn of the century and baby brother Hewey last year. She did reach her goal of 100, having been the New Year's baby of 1912.

As I stand here looking at the headstone, something doesn't seem right in the dates. Pa Hewey's date of birth and date of death seem right, but the date of marriage can't be right. It is printed Aug. 2, 1930. I always thought it was 1927, because my mother was born in 1928 and I was in 1945 at the end of the war. I know that date is right because Mom would be turning 84 today if she had lived.

I remember that date came up in 1980, the year that I had moved back to Cookeville to work. Pa and Ma Haney had their 50th wedding anniversary that year. When I told my mother-in-law that I was going to my grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary, she looked at me oddly.

"Aren't you 36?" she asked.

I responded, "Yes."

"How old was your mother when she had you?" she asked.

"17," I responded.

She asked, "How old is she?"

I responded, "52."

She asked, "Was that your grandmother's second marriage?"

As I did the math in my head, I said, "No," knowing that something did not add up.

I knew Pa Hewey had been a part-time preacher at a little church down towards Granville before moving to Nameless. I remembered growing up and Ma Haney always preaching Bible verses condemning dance, drinking and fornication among young people.

She always said, "Good Christian girls and boys remain pure until marriage, just like I did for Pa Hewey."

The only explanation I could come up with was a math miscalculation. None of the family on my mother's side was very educated, and I assumed they could not add, much less subtract.

So at the anniversary party, I looked at my mother and her twin and said, "If you are 52, how can this be Pa and Ma's 50th wedding anniversary?"

The twins exchanged a wild look like two deer caught in headlights and said, "It was supposed to have been last year."

Their younger sister, the smartest one among the bunch said, "No, we rescheduled in '77 because Ma was in the hospital and again the next year because Pa went in."

"How about '79? I asked.

"Don't you remember Sis got her divorce that year? They said.

The mystery was solved, I thought, until now. Vaguely I remember an odd event from a funeral from 1996. An old friend of my father had passed and I was talking to his mother before she passed. She was a silly old woman who claimed she had grown up next to Ma Haney.

She would snicker and say, "Your Ma was a wild one in her day. She was the best Charleston dancer in all of Jackson County."

I just grinned and agreed. I knew Ma Haney had never been a dancer. She winked and said, "Want to hear a secret?"

"I guess," I agreed.

"Buford Haney got you Ma with child right before the Great Depression." She grinned. "Then he ran off to Michigan before old man Medley got a shot gun wedding fixed up."

I just looked at the old woman and grinned. I knew there was no way that old drunk man I had seen on the square was my grandpa. I was reassured by my Mom that there was no truth to the story.

She said, "You can't believe anything that old woman says; she had 'old timers.'"

Now as I stand here looking at the date, I can only wonder. Is the date correct, or is Buford the drunk my grandpa?

*Read more 'Writers Corner' at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>