

THE PERFECT GIRL MY MOTHER SHOULD HAVE PICKED FOR ME

'Writer's Corner'

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My mother, Ma Haney and aunts were all insistent that when it came time to find a girlfriend, I needed to pick one from their church denomination. "Mixed marriages," Ma Haney claimed, never worked. That was what she referred to as marriages between members of her church and any other faith, race or creed. She said it wasn't good for the children of such unions and did everything she could to ensure they were broken up.

However there wasn't much to pick from in Nameless. All the girls at Pa Haney's church were either too young or too old for me. All the girls in the eighth grade at school with me went to the other church, which Ma Haney called "the Church of Sinners!"

Then I started high school. That was when Ma Haney said I couldn't wait at her house to catch the bus to Jackson county High and my dad made a turn around for the bus since we were in the Putnam County School system. That let me be an outsider at Upperman High School for my freshman year. But there were a lot more gals to pick from than at the little two-roomed school house in Nameless. And I found my dream girl right off.

She was in both my science and Algebra class. She watched both "Star Trek" and "Dark Shadows." Every day at class I came to realize just how perfect she was. The only problem was that she lived so far away in Buffalo Valley.

On Sunday, my heart fell as I walked into Pa Haney's church. My dream girl was sitting with Randy Haney, who I went to grammar school with. When he saw me, he gestured for me to sit with them. Then I learned my dream girl was my old buddy's first cousin. His dad and hers were brothers. At that moment I realized just how perfect she was. She was from the same denomination as the rest of the Haney clan.

When I got home, my mother noticed my attention for the new girl. She asked what I thought about her and I made the mistake of saying, "She's going to be my girlfriend."

My mother's response was, "You and that girl are cousins. Pa Haney and her daddy are fourth cousins and that makes you all second cousins."

I knew something was up. My mother was being secretive again. If Pa Haney and her dad were fourth cousins, then she and Pa Haney with fifth cousins, my mother and her sixth cousins and we were lucky seventh cousins. Seventh didn't count legally or morally and I didn't care how my mother figured it. She was bad at math and got confused when she couldn't count it on her fingers.

When I got to school on Monday, I was determined that I was going to pursue my dream girl no matter what my mother said. Then shock hit me as I caught up with her over lunch. She advised, "My daddy says for me to stay away from you."

I asked, "Why?"

"He says he don't like your dad and Haney's are not suppose to associate with Flints."

But my mother is a Haney!" I blurted out.

"Yes, and he says she is one of the bad ones and he would disown any daughter who took up with one of them, especially if he had Flint blood in him."

That night I tried asking Pap about the feud and he denied knowing anything about it. He grinned and said, "If there is any secret feud going on, it must be between old Buford and your Ma Bullar." He grinned again. "I once heard old Buford ran away to Michigan just to get clear of that old, mean grandma of yours."

About that time, my mother squealed out, "I had a good family," and ran off to the bedroom crying whenever anything bad was said about Ma Haney.

Things got worse on Sunday. I tried asking Ma Haney about the secret and all she would do was spout Bible verses on the sin of incest and I shouldn't be having such thoughts about a blood cousin. This convinced me there was a secret about that girl and every question met a brick wall.

I graduated high school with Rita Renee Haney, always admiring her from a distance. We both went to college and enrolled in engineering – she in industrial and I in mechanical. She married some guy and moved to Texas. I never heard from her again as she failed to return for high school reunions.

In the years that followed, I refused to ever set foot in Ma Haney's church again. I kept any liaison with the ladies secret. She heard rumors of other races and denominations and the whole time she said, "You need to find a girl from the one, true church."

My answer was, "I found one." I also pointed out all the misadventures of those she would find and recommend from her church. One got busted for prostitution, several for drugs and others got knocked up by unknown daddies.

The real blow came when I got married. I was living in Kentucky then and surprised the whole Haney clan that I was marrying a girl from the Catholic faith whose heritage included French and Native American. The clincher was that she had been born a Yankee. Ma Haney refused to attend a pagan wedding.

Time passed and we moved to Birmingham, Ala., where I worked for the nuclear industry as a technical writer until the career-ending downsizing of the 90s. I returned home and finished my career as a freelance writer.

In 2000, I took a temporary job for the U. S. Census Bureau. One name on my list seemed familiar but I couldn't correctly place it. It was Buford Haney. In passing I asked him if he knew Pa Hewey Haney. No recollection. I mentioned the only other Haney clan I knew, my friend Randy's dad. Op Haney. Still no recollection. I tried old Grandma Bullar Haney's bunch. Still no memory. I thought of sweet little Rita Renee Haney and still no knowledge. He said he just had two boys, Joe and Luke.

The event completely passed my mind until seven years later when my mother called out of the blue and said, "They buried your grandpa last week."

I responded, "Okay," wondering what craziness she was now imagining. Grandpa Flint had passed away 30 years before and Pa Haney at least a good 10 before.

She continued, "Your real grandpa, Buford Haney, he died last week."

My response was. "That is the first time I ever heard about that."

"I just wanted to let you know in case you heard about it from someone else," she said as she hung up with a hasty goodbye.

I pondered the event and thought about all the times something seemed strange. I thought it was odd Pa and Ma Haney having a 50th wedding anniversary with twin 53-year-old daughters in attendance. I also wondered about Aunt Boops' picture being in the newspaper with the caption "Guess Who's 50 next month?" I wondered how old Buford didn't remember old Ma Haney that he once got knocked up, his

brother Op or even his daughter Rita Rena. I know Ma Haney might have been a bad repressed memory, but the other two were obviously a lie or Alzheimer's.

Slowly regret filled my heart. For some reason I always felt Pa Haney favored the other grandkids over me. I always assumed it was because he didn't like my dad since he didn't humble himself to Ma Haney like the other sons-in-laws. But I knew the truth.

The perfect gal for me could have been my aunt-wife.

*Read more of G. W. Brown's stories and 'Writers Corner' at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>