

The Life of An Ordinary Man

The Autobiography of Harold Cunningham

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To Jake.... my Grandson

I'm writing this journal Jake, so that you will have somewhat of a short history of your Grandpa Harold's life. I may not be here to answer your questions if you have any by the time you get old enough to inquire about the people, places, and things that may become important to you.

So here we go.....

I first saw you when you were approximately one hour old. You had not even been weighed yet. I fell in love with you right that minute. I had my old baseball cap on; and I bent my head over so that the tip of the bill touched your forehead. From that time on you and I have always played a game with my cap. I'm sure that bonded us together forever.

I may not be your real grandpa, but I bet no grandpa loves their grandbaby anymore that I love you. At this time I don't have any other grandbabies, and I'm 70 years old. This date today is August 5, 1997. No one will be able to tell you about where and how I was raised as a little boy like you.

Well, I was born in Archer City, Texas on the 2nd of July, 1927. My mom and dad moved to Houston, Texas where my mother gave birth to my sister Mildred. I also had an older sister named Ruth and an older brother named Olan.

My dad gave me an old fifty cent piece when I was born. I still have it. I also gave you a Susan B. Anthony Silver Dollar, and an old railroad type of watch so that you will have something of mine to see, and through this, you and I will always be connected.

I went into the service on January 23, 1946 at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. I was a skinny kid at the time. I was drafted into the Army. The people in power came by and made the announcement that anyone who wanted to sign over to the regular army for three years would receive a bonus of three hundred dollars. Man that was a lot of money. Nothing left to do; I signed over and was able to be transferred to the Army Air Force. Anyway, I really liked the service so I got promoted quite fast. I think if I would have had the education I could have become a very good Field Grade Officer.

I have already told your Granny who probably loves you more than anything, that I have a feeling you are going to become a great General or C.E.O of some company. We both love you and expect you to be a great man.

End,

Old Harold

Forward Number Two

After having started this journal of my life as I best know it and I had dedicated this journal to my grandson Jake, some other great things have happened. I now have three more grandsons that I am also going to dedicate this journal to.

I started writing this journal in 1997, and now that I'm finishing it up in 2010, I want to add the names of my son's boys also. That would be Shane Michael, Bradley James, and Gage Denton. When I started this journal I did not think I would ever live long enough to see anymore grandbabies and I suppose if I keep getting more I will have to keep writing and adding to the opening foreword.

You're all a bunch of wonderful kids and I love you. May the best of everything come to pass for you, but it won't be free. Hard work and a belief in something greater than yourself will make it happen.

Old Grandpa Harold

2010



From the front: Gage (2 yrs.), Bradley (4 yrs.), Shane (9 yrs), Jake (13 yrs.) -2008

Old Harold's Story

I'll start by making an excuse that anyone reading this will surely agree with me that I'm sure not a professional writer. There will be mistakes, though time lines won't be right, all the names will be right. This is my story as I remember it. I'm going back quite a few years and one hell of a lot of real estate has passed under these old feet so I hope you will read this and maybe not make some of the mistakes I did.

To start with; somewhere around four P.M. on the second day of July, 1927, I made my entrance into this world. This was at a small town in North Texas by the name of Archer City. My dad was an oil field mechanic and moved frequently from town to town following the work being done in the oil fields. I'm not sure how long we lived at Archer City, for some reason my dad moved us to Houston, Texas where he had bought a house for my mom.

We lived on Vincent Street not far from the Buffalo Bayonne. I can just remember another kid by the name of Tommy Watson who lived down the block from us that I played with. In those days our parents didn't worry too much about their kids playing outside.

There was a vacant lot across the street from our house where my brother who was about 14 years old played baseball with a bunch of other boys. My dad always liked big cars and he had a big old yellow Buick convertible in the back yard. I would play in it once in awhile.

Dad was working in another town for the Humble Oil Company on their fleet of trucks. He was working underneath one of the trucks and when he crawled out from under the truck the door was open and he struck the back of his head on the corner of the door. The injury was greater than anyone thought at the time. Later, as time went by he developed a blood clot and it caused him to be paralyzed on his right side. After that he couldn't work and the Great Depression was setting in, so he lost the house.

My mom's mother lived on a farm with a first cousin of ours named Alton Blundell. She had helped raise him from a little child since his dad, Uncle Johnny, had died.

Mom got all of our belongings packed up to leave Houston. My mother's brother, uncle Matt, came down with an old Model A Ford truck. After everything was loaded onto the truck, we drove away from our house in Houston and the last thing I can remember was my dad sitting on the front porch waving bye to us. My mother, uncle, and two sisters rode up front while my brother and I rode on top of the furniture back to my grandma's place at Thompsonville, Texas.

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My grandmother had this 210 acre farm where she had two houses. There was the big house and then the little house where the hired help live. "We was poor" as the old saying goes. We didn't know it and we were as happy as the richest kids could be. This is where I lived when I started school. We lived in this old house for about six years.

Sometimes before my grandmother Blundell died, all of her offspring gathered together for a reunion at my grandmother's house. She had a large house it had a porch full length front and back with a hallway down through the center of the house connecting them together.

My sister and I were the youngest to attend. I got into a lot of trouble that day. First there was a little girl there about three years old. I think she was a third cousin. She got my marbles and put them in her rubber panties. I pulled her panties off to retrieve them. That was my first spanking that day.

The ladies were making all these nice pies and chocolate was my favorite. The pies were sitting on a shelf by an open window so I slipped up by them and stuck my finger in one of the pies which was chocolate and got me a taste. Mom knew who the culprit was so here came another spanking.

The kids were the last ones to get to eat so when it came time to eat and after we had finished eating our dinner we got our pie. There was this first cousin of ours named Earl Blundell who was sitting next to me. He was already a grown man and I didn't like him.

The reason I didn't like him was because one day he and one of his friends were hunting squirrels they came by the little house where we were living. Earl had a shot gun and he told me to put my hands out and he would give me something. He turned the barrel of the gun down to my hand and out come a baby snake. We called that kind of baby snake a coach whip. Actually it was a blue racer. They were non poisonous, but it scared the hell out of me.

Anyway, back to the pie. Earl kept sliding his hand over to make me believe that he was going to steal my pie. My mom told Earl, "You had better leave that boy alone." But, he didn't and slid his hand over like he was going to take my pie. He got his hand over close enough to touch my pie and when he did I stabbed him in his hand with a fork. He wanted mom to give me a whipping, but she told him he was the one that should get a whipping since she had told him several times that he better not be messing with that boy. Anyway that put a stop to that and I never ever had anymore dealing of any kind with Earl.

After all the men had eaten dinner they gathered up on the front porch. Some were sitting in chairs and others sitting along the edge of the porch. Smoking was the big thing for men in those days. So they all put out there "ready rolls" and lit themselves up one and also comparing the different brands with each other. They only smoked their store bought cigarettes on special occasions. They would smoke one up then thump the butt out into the yard. I would make like I was playing with my snuff bottles, I was using as cars until I could get close enough to one of the longer butts. Then I would pick it up go around to the back of the house where Grandmas two holer outhouse was. I would go inside the outhouse take a piece of the old catalog paper, wrap it around the end of the cigarette light it up and make like I was smoking. I was bad about playing with matches.

On one of my trips to the outhouse I lit up my make believe cigarette and the paper I had wrapped around it caught on fire. It burned my nose, so of course, I threw it down. It fell inside one of the holes where I couldn't get to it, set the paper afire at the bottom of the hole, and then all hell broke loose as it set the outhouse on fire and burned it down.

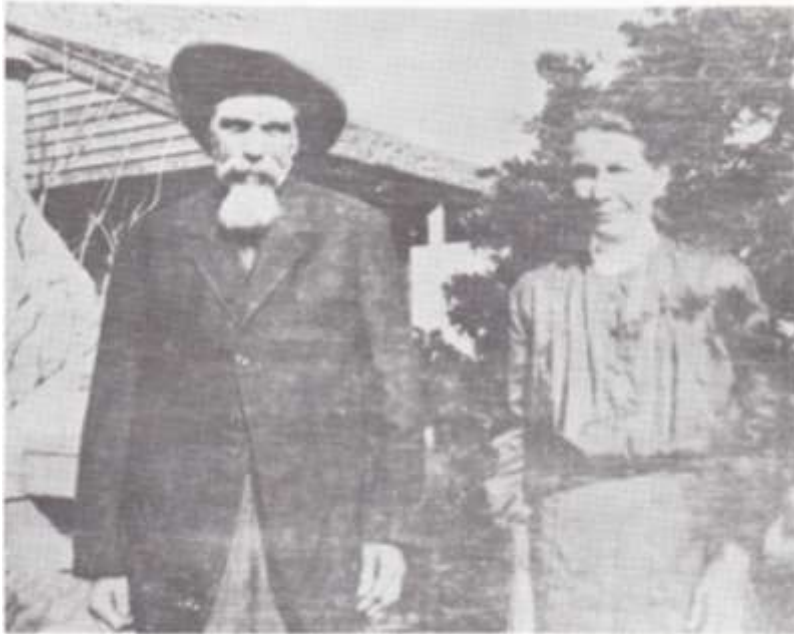
All the men were trying to put the fire out with a bucket brigade but it didn't work. I saw mom heading for the peach orchard to get her a good switch to give me a gook licking for playing with matches. I remember a couple of my uncles trying to get mom not to give me a licking because by this time they were all laughing so hard because I had tried to smoke and burned the shit house down. Their pleas got nowhere as mom gave me a real good whipping telling me, "I'll teach you to play with matches!" That was the third and last whipping I got that day.

By this time my brother had joined the CCC and was stationed at Bastrop, he was learning about building things with wood. He got to come home once in awhile, and one weekend he came home cut down a big black jack oak tree out back of our little house. He cut this up into lengths to fit into the wood cook stove and also the fireplace for the winter that was coming on down from the North.

Mom and my brother piled the limbs that couldn't be used as fire wood in a pile about one hundred feet from our house about two months later he came home again and I heard my mother and him talking about the brush pile being dry enough to burn.

This was before my grandma had died and one day while mom was over at grandmas taking care of her I decided to test the brush pile to see if it was ready to burn. I made a little pile of leaves set them on fire and sure enough the brush pile was ready to burn. Mom saw the smoke from grandma's house and here she come over the little hill and heading straight for the peach orchard to get a switch. I was trying to put out the fire carrying a one gallon lard can full of water from the cistern to the fire. It didn't do any good.

Mom caught me and gave me a good switching telling me all the time that, "I'll teach you to play with matches!"—I don't know when I no longer wanted to play with matches.



Matt A. and Angeronie Reager Blundell

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One night after school I was playing in the backyard and it was beginning to get dark. Mom always made us kids get in the house before dark as she was afraid the copperhead snakes would be out and about. Anyway, she called me several times, but I didn't pay any attention. There was about ten acres back of the house where our old cow named Pet grazed. When I didn't pay any attention to what mom told me or I just ignored her, she came out of the house with a switch.

I was about seven years old and thought I could outrun my mom. I started to run away from her and about every step I took she hit me with the switch across my butt. I thought maybe if I would just stop and take my whipping it would all be over. But, mom had other ideas. When I started to stop she said, "No, no, run now, run!" and she whipped my butt all over that ten acres it seemed like anyway.

I never ran from my mom again. I want you to know our mom loved us kids and was never mean, we deserved every bit of what we got. I know our mom loved us more than anything. But she had a hard time during the Depression trying to farm and raise the three

of us. Thank God she had the good fortune to make us kids learn what was right and what was wrong.

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Since there was hardly any toys to play with my sister Ruth, Mildred, and myself had to make up our own games to entertain ourselves. Some of the things we did outside the house was to go down by the little creek that made its channel through the property. There was water probably from a spring that kept some mud puddles with water in them the year around.

We would take lids from cans and bottles then make up mud to the right consistency and press it into the lids so that we could then turn them over and make mud pies, layer cakes, and whatever else we could think of. We tried to find different shapes of lids to try and out do the other in these designs.

Also around these mud puddles would be crawdad holes where they made little mud castles to trap bugs and anything else that had a mishap and fell in to eat. Mom would give us a small piece of bacon in which we would tie on the end of a string then drop it down in the crawdad hole. The crawdad would grab it with its claws and wouldn't let go. We could pull them out of the hole if they were large enough we would keep them and take them back to the house for mom to fry the tails. The larger the crawdad castle the larger the crawdad was that was using it as his home. These crawdads had large pinchers and could make you hurt when he clamped down on your finger.

When we got tired of playing with mud pies and crawdad we would find doodle bug residences and take a small stick or straw to push it down to the bottom of his home and move it around chanting "doodle bug, doodle bug, come get your coffee. Your house is on fire, your house in on fire!" The doodle bug would come to the top. Doodle bugs like sandy soil as their little homes were shaped like a funnel. When a bug or ant or any small insect fell in, it couldn't climb out because of the loose sand of the sides of the funnel type hole and the doodle bug had a meal. We didn't do anything with the doodle bugs just catch them and play with them as they were not very big and safe to handle.

All of us had our own swing made from old automobile tires or maybe sometimes if we could find a good board and some small chain we would make a real swing. Sometimes we got these swings going so high I often wonder how we kept from hurting ourselves.

When mom wasn't around we would play Annie Over. The way this was played you would take a rubber ball throw it over the top of the roof so it could roll down the other side. The person on that side would try to catch it. The game needed at least two players one on each side of the house. The one who was in possession of the ball would holler "Annie!" and the person on the other side would say, "Over!" The person throwing the ball tried to throw it somewhere so the other person couldn't catch it. This was a no no game because the ball could crack or break the wooden shingles and cause the roof to leak. That's why you only played it when you knew it was safe from mama's all seeing watchful eyes.

At night we played hide and seek in the house, but it was a small house and not many places to hide. It was fun. Then when we went to bed the kerosene lamp put out enough

illumination so that we could make all kinds of shadow formations with our hands that were projected onto the wall.

Also sometimes, one of us would perform some deed that earned you a whipping, while that kid was getting spanked the other two would sneak a peek and laugh and giggle about the one getting the whipping. Then mom would catch the two that were laughing and give them a spanking also telling them, “You think this is funny?”

In the spring when the wild flowers bloomed, our meadows around the place would be alive with all kinds of flowers there was this one we called sweet William. It was more like a wild phlox, but there were so many designs inside the blooms. We would see how many different kinds of designs we could find.

Then we got to chase grasshoppers that were as large as humming birds. These grasshoppers would have all different shades of colors and designs when they would fly and spread their wings. They could fly a really long way so we had to be very stealthy to catch one.

Anyway we always had something to do that kept us occupied. We didn't get into that much trouble, but of course we were not angels.

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You know many years have passed

When your grandson pulls the

Skin up on your arm and asks,

“Grandma are you old?”

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My grandma got very sick as she was getting up in age. Since my mom was the one living closest to her mother it fell to her to take the job as caretaker. Mom had a lot of chores plus trying to raise all of her kids.

I remember an incident that has stayed with me all my life. When I was about eight years old and my little sister was about five, we were playing, and my sister Mildred did something that made me mad, so I slapped her and made her cry. My mom didn't whip me, she said, “Harold, you are a boy; a man; and stronger than girls, so therefore, you should never hit a female or a girl!” She said, “You see that old bull cow don't you?” I said, “Yes.” So she went on to say, “Have you ever seen a bull fight a cow?” I said, “No.” She went on to say, “You are a bull and the girl is a cow so don't you ever hit a girl.” So far I have never, ever (though my patience has been tried) hit or slapped another female.

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Way back in 1934 there was this old black man by the name of Edmond Flowers. Edmond had four girls and one boy that he was raising and taking care of by himself. I don't know what the arrangement were, but mom let him and his family live in the little house after grandma passed on. I know mom charged him no rent and they didn't have to do any chores for the rent. My mom was good hearted like about 80 percent of the people who lived around that part of the country.

Contrary to what has always been the incorrect stories, and word of mouth propaganda about how mean and wicked we white folks were to the black folks is a lot of lies. There were some real mean people I will admit, but most people were Christian in their actions and we didn't want to inflict injury on anyone. We were made to live apart, but that still didn't give way to being unnecessarily mean. That was the law at that period of time.

Anyway, Edmond would cut wood for mom which she paid him to do if she had any money. If not, then she would barter for his work. I was always down in the woods with Edmond when he was cutting wood. He would show me how to stack the wood, how much wood it would take to make a cord. He had no education, but he knew all about the woods and farming.

I really liked Edmond, and when mom went to town (when she could) she would bring my sisters and I five or six sticks of candy, like lemon, peppermint or orange flavor. I would save a piece and take it down to Edmond. He would make over me like I just gave him a mule and ten acres.

Anyway, Edmond was raising all those kids himself. I think his wife had passed on. I don't remember what the boy's name was, but the girls' names were Edna, Bootles, Little Bit, and Girl Baby. These were their real names!

Edna would help mom when mom could pay her or barter for her help. Most of the time mom had Edna help with the laundry. They had to build a fire around a big iron kettle to boil the clothes in, if it was something that needed it. All the laundry was pushed up and down on a rub board then rinsed and hung on a clothes line.

Edna dipped snuff like all the women (or most of them) did. She would make a ball out of the snuff and place it in her lower lip. One day, when no one was around my little sister Mildred and I found a snuff can hidden away under the back steps to the house. We opened it and found several balls of snuff about the size of a marble. Nothing could stop us, so we had to try our hand at dipping snuff. We put one in our lower lip and made like we knew how it was done. The only thing about this was that we swallowed some of the juice. Mom found both of us sick as we could be. Mom didn't say anything just put us to bed.

Little Bit and Bootles, I don't remember or know what they did, but Girl Baby went to school about two miles away where there was a school for the blacks.

Mom had planted about one acre of Irish potatoes and they were getting to be about half grown. She had Edmond come over and take the one old mule she owned, and hook it up to a plow to clean out between the rows. I kept pestering her to let me do some of the plowing. Finally, mom told Edmond, "Go ahead, let him try." So Edmond put the reins around my shoulders, set the plow up in the middle of the two rows, and let me go. I went about ten or twenty feet when the plow fell over to one side and I couldn't keep it up right. The old mule started going across the rows since I was most probably pulling the reins, telling him to go that way. I was digging up the potato plants, and Edmond had to run out and get things under control.

My mom had sent off and ordered several strawberry plants to put in her garden. Strawberries were little known around that area during the 1930's. Anyway, they came along and thrived very well. One day, mom was picking some of the strawberries when

Little Bit and Bootles came by, stopped and was talking to mom. Little Bit wanted to know what kind of berries mom was picking. Mom told her they were strawberries. Little Bit then told mom, "I sho do like strawberries, but I ain't never taste one." Mom gave here some to taste.

I'm not sure what happened to Edmond and his girls, but I think they moved to Wealder, Texas about eight miles away where Edmond got a job in the Gin. The Gin was where they took the seeds out of the cotton and baled it. There was also a grist mill, where you could take your corn and have it made into corn meal.—Sure hope he found peace.

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Old is when you no longer

Can drive or shoot marbles

-Old Harold 2010

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My brother walked about four miles one way to school in Thompsonville. He graduated from the high school there which at that time was only ten grades. My sister Ruth and I went to a small one room school about two miles from where we lived. We walked that two miles each day, and we were not allowed to miss a day unless we were really sick or the creeks were flooding the countryside. There were no bridges over the creeks.

The teacher (a Miss Jones) had to teach eight grades in that one room schoolhouse. The name of the school was Unity. I completed the third grade at this school. There were four of us in the first grade. We usually finished our assignments early and Miss Jones would let us go outside and play until school was out at four P.M.

Since we let our chickens roost in the trees behind the house the owls would catch one now and then. There was an old varmint trap with jaws on it to hold whatever got caught or tripped it stored in the hen house. This trap belonged to my brother Olan who was away in the Tree Army. He had used it to trap skunks and possums. Since he wasn't using it, I decided to make use of it.

I got a tall pole, put it up out back of the house, and tied it to a fence post. Owls and hawks like to sit on top of anything that is higher than the surrounding territory so they can see anything small moving around in the grass or brush.

I set my trap on top of this pole and tied it to the top of the pole with a piece of chain. The next morning my mom said, "I think you have caught yourself an owl in your trap." Sure enough! I looked out back and saw an owl trying to get away, flying around and then just hanging down the side of the pole.

I took me a stick, proceeded out to where the trap was and it was a very big owl that acted like it was going to attack me. He started to fly around so I hit him on the head with my stick. He quit moving so I assumed I had killed him.

Anyway, I took him out of the trap, carried him down to the backward where the chickens were eating grain my mom had put out for them. I just laid him on the ground and went on in the house to finish getting ready for school.

After a little while we heard the chickens start clucking and cackling. When we looked outside there was the old owl having come to just sitting on the ground looking all the chickens over. After a little while he flew away. I never caught anymore owls.

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The uglier I get on the outside-

The prettier I get on the inside.

Old Harold-2010

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At recess everyone in the school would usually play softball. We played what we called “work-up” since we didn’t have enough players to make up two teams. When school let out for the lunch recess, and everyone had eaten you ran out, and got a position wherever you could. Everyone wanted to work up to be able to get to bat.

The school had two old outhouses, one for the girls and the other one for the boys. One day, I moved up to second base and I had a pretty good chance to have a turn at bat. I needed to go to the outhouse to pee, but if I left to go, I would lose my spot, so I peed on the second base. My cousin Edella saw me and reported me to the teacher that I was going to the bathroom (or “outhouse”) on second base. I not only lost my spot, the teacher took me inside, and I got spanked and could not go back outside. There went my chance to become a star!

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Boys grow into men

Men grow into old men

Old men get ancient

Leaving your heritage

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Along about the winter of 1934 when I was seven years old, my mom came down with the flu and she was really sick. She couldn’t get up out of bed to do any of the chores, so she called my sister Ruth and myself in to explain what had to be done. She told Ruth that she would have to do the cooking for all of the family.

Mom told me since I was the only man around that I was now the man of the house and that I would have to do the outside chores. That meant I had to slop the hog, feed the chickens, and milk the cow. She said the cow had to be milked or she would go dry. I had never milked a cow before. I watched mom and that was all the training I had. Anyway, I got the milk bucket and stool and then proceeded to do some milking. Well, I started pulling on the teats, and at first I wasn’t being too successful, but after awhile I started getting some milk just a little drizzle at first. I finally got some milk in the bucket and thought it was enough. I think old Pet the cow had got tired of me pulling and pushing, so

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