They Called My Momma Bulldog

The depression was in full swing when Rosalee Ann Bannon was born. Nineteen-thirty-two to be exact. The old dirt farm in southern Indiana wasn’t paying its way so like so many depression era farmers the family had to move on.

Roy Lee Bannon, Grampa Shorty as I knew him, opened a general store in Trafalger, Indiana but that too succumbed to the economy. Again they moved on.

With so many moves in a short period the family children, Rosalee, Donald, and Virginia had to rely on each other for stability and friendship. Rosalee (Mom) had a fierce loyalty to her family. She was sensitive to the fact that her father was only four foot seven and had a Quasimodo hump in his back. He squirmed out of his mother’s arms at eighteen months old and broke his back.

She was always small for her age. She stood up straight and strained to reach four foot eleven when I knew her as Mom. Virginia was a sickly child who needed special attention and Donald was very young when they migrated north to Noblesville.

The new neighborhood held promise. There were three girls that lived in the house down the dead end street. One of them, Pauline Milligan, became Mom’s lifelong friend.

There was no sign naming the street so the kids in the neighborhood came up with an appropriate name. They (or rather the dogs) came up with Dog Turd Alley. That is the only name I ever heard it called.

Every neighborhood has its drama. Theirs was supplied by an older boy and his little brother. They picked on Mom and her siblings constantly. Grampa Shorty stood by the roadside when the school bus came through one day to confront the boys and ask them to stop bullying his kids. My Grandmother Leota was standing in the side ditch watching. One of the boys came up and pushed her down. My grandfather helped her up and called the police. They said there wasn’t a lot they could do; the kids would just have to work it out.

There was fire building in Momma’s eyes! December 7, 1941 The Japs bombed pearl harbor and war was declared on Japan and the Axis alliance. Friends and family members were lining up at the selective service offices to enlist. Momma was about to declare war of her own. She cut a “Y” out of a tree limb about two feet tall. She buried the tail of the “Y” in the ground and attached the inner tube of a bicycle tire to the other two ends. Giant slingshot; Instant artillery! She sat on her backside and placed her feet against the forks of the weapon and pulled with all her might and unleashed the first rounds. The boys couldn’t see where the rocks were coming from because her position was hidden by a pine tree. She didn’t really want to hurt them, just scare some sense into them.

The next day, when she confronted them they were their normal obnoxious selves. Talk of the war was everywhere. Children spoke of older brothers or Fathers or cousins going to fight the Japs. Mom had uncles going off to war.

The oldest boy said, “I hope the Japs win!”

It was a long time before he got another full breath. Momma snapped. She ran at him full speed and hit him in the midsection with all the strength she could muster. She sat on his chest and pummeled away like a mad dog! The bus pulled up and the driver assessed the situation and decided to mosey out there to break up the fight. He knew the score; most bus drivers do. He timed his arrival just right so Momma couldn’t be charged with manslaughter. He wanted to let the first school lesson of the day for the boy sink in!

The beating wasn’t the worst of his day. All the kids on the buss saw the fight. He’d been beaten unmercifully by a girl half his size and younger to boot! The humiliation was just too much for him to bear. His credibility as a bully was ruined.

The neighborhood settled into an uneasy truce. When he started to backslide Momma would show the fire in her eyes and calm his storm. I’ve seen that look many times!

The story doesn’t end there. In her teen years a classmate started to tease her about her father’s deformity. He got a lesson with his own history book as she pummeled his head. I don’t know how much of it soaked in but Momma got the point across. The next day his father stood behind the boy and made him apologize to Rosalee. It seems the boys Grandfather was in a mental ward.

The reputation bulldog served as a deterrent for the Bannon Kids until they were old enough to fend for themselves but it made things hard for Momma to get a prom date!

Dan Fulton

5/4/19