

Without Apology, A Family Chronicle (book I)

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Jack Dukes 3320 Alderwood Ave. Bellingham, WA 98225 jacksarajane@comcast.net autobiography 31,481 words WITHOUT APOLOGY: A FAMILY CHRONICLE (Book I) by JACK DUKES ISBN 1452831718 EAN-13 9781452831718 2 JOE AND ZINA This chronology begins with a genealogical dead end. It is not always a pretty story. The facts and rumors of our heritage (your heritage) that I saw or knew of are all here. In cases where my memory has failed, I have used directed imagination, i.e., I know the way they spoke, what they ate, what they smelled like, their education (or lack of it). I feel confident that my fill-ins are accurate. There is a box full of documentations of every kind for any of you that choose to continue this chronicle. By this book, you will know your beginnings. You will learn of the incredible hardships my parents and maternal grandparents had to go through so that you could be born. Do not think for a second that you would be alive if any of them had failed in their life's missions. My father, Joseph William Dukes, was born on July 30, 1910 to a prostitute mother. She had no idea who the father was. Joe was the product of a rape. Joe's mother, Mabel, nee Dukes, gave Joe her own father's name. When he was but eleven, she threw him out of her house and onto the streets of San Antonio, Texas. Her new boyfriend didn't like kids and, to Mabel, getting rid of Joe was an easy release from the terrors of single motherhood in 1921 Texas. Joe hawked newspapers, pulled weeds, washed windows and slept wherever he could, mostly along the banks of the San Antonio River. His experiences there forced him into a hard-working, self-reliant, do-whatever-it-takes adulthood. Jess and Rose Heiner (I and my two sisters, Jeannine Jo and Donna Carol, were required to call them "aunt" and "uncle" and say "yes, sir" and "no, ma'am") befriended Joe and took him into their hearts but not their home. I have no idea of what the reason was. However, they stayed friends and visited each other a lot. Aunt Rose died in the forties and Jess just disappeared. I remember her most for her gift to me of a bright red bicycle she bought for five dollars. It was barely a bicycle, just a frame and two wheels, but I totally loved it for the freedom it gave me. Joe attended a one-room school for a while but he was too far behind to catch up so he never finished the 6th grade. He was 19 before he saved enough money to buy a second-hand Indian Motorcycle. Why he ever came to Muscotah, Kansas, no one ever knew. Grandpa said it was because he got a girl in the family way and her brothers were after Texas. Joe wouldn't talk about it. The largest building in town served as grocery store, gas station, tavern, and town hall. Located on Kickapoo Street, it was also a snack bar specializing in hard-boiled eggs and pickled pigs' feet. It was Joll's favorite place to hang out. He wasn't there on the day that Joe rode into town on his roaring motorcycle. He shut it off beside the porch, got off and stood beside it. "God, it's hot!" said Joe to the farmers sitting in the shade of the porch. "Any cold beer in there?" Prohibition was still in force, but everywhere you looked, there was a mini-brewer, a wine maker, or a gin specialist. "One or two," said the only non-overalled man sitting there as he arose and held open the screen door. "Go, ahead, kid. I reckon you own that there bike. You sure couldn't steal anything that loud!" "Hell, I ain't no thief. Lord knows I've been desperate, but not that desperate. Know any place I might get a day's work around here?" "As a matter-of-fact, I do. Joll Smith is a laid-up SpanishAmerican War veteran. He got shot and it flares up on him once in a while. He can't do nothing heavy then. His old lady's a wheelchairconfined cripple. He's got a couple of teenaged

kids. They try hard, but they can't do it all. He's only a sharecropper but if he don't produce, he don't get a share. He can't pay you anything, but you'll get a place to sleep and some pretty good grub. Sarah's a real good cook. Interested?" "Sure am! I ain't had me no home cooking in quite awhile!" "Ok. Take the north road out of here; keep going until you see an old, weather-beaten clap-board home and that's it." They took their beers back out onto the porch and sat guzzling and gossiping until Joe finally left with his noisy muffler. He finally saw the isolated farmhouse from a high spot in the road. It sat on cleared land in the midst of four cornfields. Joe drove up the long, long driveway, past the substantial vegetable garden, past the cherry and apple trees, one on each side of the driveway, with a giant old live oak close to the house and almost as tall as the second-story window. Joe rode up the pathway as slowly as he could to keep the muffler noise down. All four of them: Joll Rupert Smith (52), his wife, Sarah Belle or Bell (37), in her wheelchair, Zina Ellen (16) and Carroll William (14) were gathered on the front porch, side-by-side, watching the stranger chugging and snorting his way to the porch. He sat his bike on its stand and waited. "How do?" asked Joll (my grandfather). "What can we do for you?" "4 "Howdy," said Joe (my father). I'm Joe Dukes. I just learned that you could maybe use a hand around here." "Is the law after you?" asked Joll. "Nope. I'm an honest man." "Can't pay you nothing. I can only wait until the harvest and give you part of my share." "Suits me. You got a place for me to sleep?" "In the barn. There's a cot in a small room there." "What about chow?" "You hungry? Zina, fix him up with something to eat and drink and bring it out here. It's too hot to be inside. Black coffee okay? I like it strong." Joe nodded. "Much obliged," he said. "We'll share our table with you. This is Sarah, my wife. You can see she's crippled up but she can sure cook! That was Zina and this is Carroll. Don't ever call him Carl. He hates it. And keep your hands off of Zina. I catch you fooling around, I'll kill you." The serious look on his face was suddenly replaced with a hearty laugh. "Welcome, Joe! Tell us something about yourself." "Hell, there ain't nothing to tell about me. I'm a Texan. I ain't got no family. Nobody cares if I'm dead or alive. I'm hard-working and I'm honest. And that's all I'm gonna say. The rest of it, you'll see for yourself." Zina brought out a plate of chicken and baked beans. Joe wolfed the food down without wasting a second. Sarah smiled at his appreciation. "You're going to be easy to cook for, Mr. Dukes. I'll see you don't go hungry." "Thank you kindly, ma'am. I wonder if you could show me where I can bed down and take care of my bike. I'm pure-D tired." "Carroll, you show him but don't dilly-dally. He needs his rest." "I'll do it! I'll do it!" said Zina as she jumped off the steps next to the bike. "I ain't never seen a motorcycle before." She turned to Joe. "Can I ride it? Is it safe?" "Maybe tomorrow, if it's ok by your folks. Good night." Joe lay down on the half-twin bed and went immediately to sleep. Zina lingered, stroking the motorcycle all over, until Sarah called her. It threatened to rain on that first night that Joe spent in the barn. The thunder awoke him about 2 or 3 AM. He heard wind whipping 5 through the other side of the barn. He checked to ensure his motorcycle was safe. It was, and he went back to sleep immediately. The rooster began crowing just before the sun rose. Joe awoke like an animal. His every sense was immediately alert. It was a trait that he would keep for the rest of his life. He sniffed the air and smelled only the ripe aroma of the barn. In a few seconds, he relaxed and started to remember his greeting and luck in finding a job. He grinned and danced a little circle while he shoved his clenched fists in the air. Just then, Zina came out. "Howdy," she said. "I came out to collect the eggs. Wanta help me?" "Shore. How many eggs you get?" "About a dozen, I guess. Why?" "I reckon I could eat a dozen all by myself." As they chatted, she moved closer to the henhouse. He followed. "Mom's making flapjacks this morning...with sugar syrup and fresh-churned butter." "Girl, you're killing me!" "Aw, you. She's doing it for you, you know," she said and giggled. "Are you as accommodating as your ma?" "Whatta you mean by that crack? You ain't gettin' fresh with me, are you?" "Forget it. I didn't say a word." "Ok. You comin' in?" "Gotta wash up first." "Trough's on the other side of the barn. More privacy that way. Hurry up." Zina trotted off with her egg basket and checked behind once to see if he was watching. He was. You can pretty much guess what happened next: Zina and Joe fell in lust. But Zina, my mother, held out for a ring. She got one. On September 1st 1929, they were married. I was conceived around the 9th of December and born on August 9, 1930. Zina was 17.

Without Apology: A Family Chronicle, is the incredible story of how two separate families found each other in the remoteness of Muscotah KS, and blended to fight against the horrid poverty of the Dust Bowl Days of the Great Depression.

From nearly dying after being born to a seventeen-year old mother, to struggling through a difficult adolescence, to eventually graduating from Army Language School with a fluency in Russian, Dukes tells not only his own fascinating story, but also those of the family members that came before him.

Included is the inspiring story of an alcoholic grandfather and a wheel-chair bound grandmother who took on the arduous task of raising three rambunctious kids after their father deserted them in their pre-teen years at the start of WW II.

This is a story of the strength of the human spirit; one that reminds us never to give up...no matter what.

Live your lives WITHOUT APOLOGY !

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