

## **Jerry's Life Story**

1935

Ralph Monroe Thornton and Della Mae Thornton, my grandma and grandpa, loaded the car with Rose Mabel Fausch and John Edward Fausch and Grandma Fausch, and drove to California where Walter Verle Thornton, my father, was working after a dismal year of farming in Iowa during the depression. The purpose of the trip was for my mom and dad, Walter and Rose to be married.

1937

Dad worked for an ice plant and lost his index finger on a machine. He then went to work driving a Good Humor Ice Cream truck. I think my life must have begun about that time because I was born August 2, 1937 at Seaside Hospital in Long Beach, California. Mom said she got 75 cents a day to feed us and she went to the Bixby Park Farmers Market daily. We lived in an apartment at that time.

After Pearl Harbor, the threat in the highly military area of southern California put the fear in all of us kids. We had mandatory blackouts, search lights, hundreds of them searched the sky at night for enemy aircraft. We felt like we were in peril at all times. The Douglas Aircraft plant in Long Beach was completely covered with camouflage. If you drove down Cherry Avenue or Carson on the perimeter of Douglas Aircraft, you were completely under the camouflage which covered an area of three square miles, with houses and trees and rivers on top of it.

1941

When the WW II came, dad was classified as 4F due to having a child and flat feet, and was not drafted. I don't know if we went to Michigan on advice of the government, or dad choose to go to Michigan to support the war effort. Dad worked in a Ford Motor plant building jeeps for the Army. My sister Kathleen was born in Michigan. We lived in a trailer park, in suburban Detroit. We had a victory garden, and everyone supported the war effort unlike it would be today. Many things were rationed. Anything that would support the soldiers was rationed; sugar, flour, gasoline, tires. I remember saving the aluminum foil off gum wrappers until we had a ball as big as a softball and then turned it in.

When the war effort ended, dad hooked onto the 32-foot trailer we lived in with a 1938 Ford and pulled it to Grandpa's farm in Iowa. We spent part of the summer in Iowa parked in front of his barn. I actually attended some school in Michigan, and then attended a few days in Colo, Iowa before we hooked onto the trailer and headed to California across the southern route, of course, because a 1938 Ford doesn't pull mountains very well with a trailer hooked on to it.

1945

When we arrived in California, the first thing I remember is buying a home at 2671 Hayes Avenue in Long Beach, California. I started school at John Muir Grade School and soon after my brother Phillip was born. I went to Silverado Park Community Church

and spent many hours at the Silverado Park which was nearby. I completed six years at John Muir grade school and enrolled in William Logan Stephen junior high. During that time I played a tenor saxophone given to me by Aunt Velda. Louie Harold was my best friend for years. We were inseparable. He lived behind us on Webster Street. We would walk the top of fences to get back and forth. My brother Phillip, Paul and sister, Twila were born in California.

It was about this time when Howard Hughes was building the “**Spruce Goose**” airplane at his Culver City airplane factory. To complete assembly, it had to be moved to the water at Terminal Island, CA. They loaded large trucks with wings, tail sections and a few fuselage pieces, and drove down Santa Fe Avenue, two blocks from my house. I sat on the curbing and watched. I wish I had known when he would fly it because I would have been there. What a historic moment!

I spent one summer with Grandma and Grandpa Thornton on the farm at Colo, IA. I rode with dad on his Watson Brothers Truck to Denver, and he put me on the train to Iowa. I must have been about 12 years old. I had a great time in Iowa that summer.

1951

When I got back to California, I encouraged my family to move to Iowa. I think they must have been ready themselves because after a time, they agreed. We loaded up the truck to move and dad put mom and the rest of the kids on the train to Iowa. The next morning, he and I were to leave for Iowa in the truck. Someone had broke into the truck, stolen my saxophone, vacuum cleaner and many other electrical appliances. I thought I was a pretty good saxophone player at the time, I thought, but that ended my music career.

1953

We rented a farm at Zeiring, Iowa of 160 acres, from Paul Weltey. We also farmed 80 acres a mile and a quarter away. The 80 acres had a barn that we could farrow 30 Duroc sows and 30 Hampshire sows. So we farmed 240 acres and raised about 800 hogs a year, plus we fattened 50 cows during the winter. I attended high school at Zeiring for two years. At that time we moved to a farm in Collins, Iowa owned by Arie Van Pilsen. There we farmed 240 acres and fattened 100 cattle in the winter time, and raised a few hogs.

1955

By now, my dad had his fill of farming. He never knew how to farm like everyone else. If a job needed done, he wouldn't let it go until tomorrow. He would have to do it on that day. I remember a time when the weather wasn't cooperating. We harvested our crops, but were unable to do our fall plowing. Dad put lights on the tractor and decided we were going to get it done. For five days, we plowed 24 hours a day. He would run the tractor in the day time. When I got out of school, I would take out 10 gallons of gas, and plow for four hours. He would come back out with 10 gallons of gas and plow the next four hours, and we did that all night. Most of the neighbors thought we were crazy, but we got the plowing done.

I attended the last two years and graduated from high school at Collins High School in 1955. During my senior year, I joined the Naval Reserve with Jack Kilgore. We attended meetings together at Fort Des Moines until I graduated and we moved. I then transferred to the Naval Station at Seal Beach, CA and continued my monthly meetings until such time as I failed to march in a July 4<sup>th</sup> parade and they discharged me from active reserves and told me I would be drafted immediately. I guess they didn't need me because I was never drafted. Eight years after I joined up, I received an honorable discharge, so that was the extent of my military career.

After my graduation, dad decided he wanted to go back to trucking in California. Dad went to California with a new 1955 Chrysler New Yorker and left us with a 1949 Packard. We rented a little bungalow in Collins, Iowa until I graduated from high school. Dad bought a house in Anaheim, CA, 551 South West Street, and purchased furniture for the entire house. This was while mom and the rest of us were still in Iowa. He flew back and we loaded up the rest of our belongings in the 1949 Packard, put in a case of oil (because we would use it all on the trip) and drove to California. When mom went to see the house, it was dark. We turned on the lights and the place was alive with roaches; a 3-year-old house alive with roaches. We stayed in a motel, hired an exterminator to put a tent over the entire house and fumigate it. It must have worked because we never saw any bugs after that.

1956

I went to work at a Mobile gasoline station for Charles Johnson. I worked there part-time and got a full-time job at Rusco Window putting windows together. Eventually, I became dissatisfied with this kind of life style and was encouraged to go back to school.

I did a short term at Fullerton Junior College and then decided to go back to Iowa State University and enroll. I had two roommates in Friley Hall, Warren Unger from Iron Mountain, Michigan who was in the Dairy program, and Duane Bunting from Sigourney, Iowa who was studying agricultural. I did not adapt to college life real well, and after one year, quit and went back to California. During my time at Iowa State, I would go back to Collins and wash cars on the weekend for Lowell Robertson at his DX Station. He would give me \$.75 for each car and he would take a quarter. I was doing well! Later, after Dorothy graduated from high school, I was in Iowa on a vacation. Before I went back to California, Dorothy's mother needed to send clothes to Dorothy because she had gone to live with her brother in California to attend Compton Junior College. So I loaded up Dorothy's clothes, took them to Dorothy in California, and could see that she was homesick. I went back several weeks later and we went to the horse races together. We had a pretty good time, so I kept seeing her. At the time, Dorothy was working part time at a doughnut shop nearby, and I was working nights at Watson Brothers Truck Line on the dock. Dorothy was 18 and I was 21 and we got married in January 1959 at Aloha Wedding Chapel on North Long Beach Blvd. The preacher at the chapel had very bad breath!

We purchased a 48 foot repossessed trailer from a bank with the help of a bank official who led me to bid a correct amount. It was a sealed bid and I outbid the next bidder by \$25. It had been painted red and was badly oxidized, so I had a professional paint it and we moved it to 6656 East Rosecrans in Paramount, CA. We lived there for 18 months and I found that Dorothy was with child. On February 21, 1960 Tracy Lynn was born at Rio Hondo Hospital in Downy, CA. She was not anxious to enter this world because Dorothy labored about 48 hours before Tracy presented herself. By then, we realized we needed to be in a house so we began looking for our own house. We sold the trailer to someone who already lived in the trailer park and purchased a home at 15009 East Cullen Street, Whittier, CA. Shortly after, good neighbors moved in next door, Ollie, Squeak and daughter, Jan Laycock. About this time, we met what became lifetime friends in Richard and Mariella Pope. Richard also worked at Watson Brothers. I don't think, in 45 years, that Richard and I ever had a disagreement.

Now Troy Layne was due to be born at East Whittier Hospital in Whittier, CA. He was anxious to get here and Dorothy only labored about one hour. We lived on Cullen Street for about four years, and then moved to 12117 South Groveland, Whittier, CA. There we met other great neighbors, Jan and Terry Hannon who had two girls about the same age as Tracy and Troy. While there, we decided to be foster parents to newborns. We had about 6 or 8 newborns and the social worker would have a new baby in her hands when she came out to the pick up the child we were caring for. Dorothy kept busy with diapers and wearing out washing machines. Baby Bobby came to our home as a foster child, and his mother had not relinquished him yet. The social worker said he could be six months to a year in our home. That's when I told Dorothy that if he was going to be with us that long, we should just put in for adoption. She agreed and "baby Bobby" became Toby Lee.

One day, Tracy and Troy came home from Meadow Green School with a note that said "we have to restrict all physical activity and keep students inside because the smog is bad." I said to Dorothy, "What are we doing here?" I had 15 years at Watson Brothers/Yellow Freight. The company name change occurred about 1971 through a merger of the two companies. I was the youngest "old timer" there when we decided to move. We both had relatives in Iowa and it seemed like a logical place for us to raise our family. We put our house up for sale, sold it in three days, loaded a U-Haul and a pickup and headed for Iowa. We stopped in Barstow to see my folks before we continued on to Iowa. My dad had tried to discourage us from doing this and thought we were making a mistake. We went on to Collins, Iowa. Dorothy drove the pickup with Tracy and Troy in it, and I drove the big truck with Toby in it. It was an adventure!

In June, 1972 Uncle Howard Hand rented a farm house for us from Ernie Travis for \$60/month that we had never even seen. It was big enough for us and we got along well there. Two years later, we couldn't find anything we liked better, so we purchased the acreage for \$12,000. We did lots of work on it to keep it warm and looking nice, and I think all of us enjoyed the country.

I had been unable to secure employment with Yellow Freight in Des Moines, IA even though I had excellent recommendations from the terminal manager and the safety man in Los Angeles. This was a time of Affirmative Action, and it was told in Des Moines that they needed some “color” in their employees. Needless to say, I was disappointed, but I found employment with a good union company in Des Moines, Vitalis Truck Line. I worked eight months for Vitalis until Yellow Freight called me and asked me to come in. I did not want to leave an outfit like Vitalis, but I did want to stay with Yellow Freight.

About the time we thought our family was complete, Dorothy was again with child. Dorothy had been suffering from Crohns disease for a number of years and doctors said she would never be pregnant again. But, through her courage, she delivered a 5-pound boy who we named Tim Leroy. She was really ill and weighed barely 100 pounds, and needed help from Tracy, Troy and myself. At that time, I could no longer be gone on the road, so the manager said I could come in at 11:00pm and work on the dock until 7:30am, allowing me to be home with the kids in the daytime and be there when they got home from school, and also help out with Dorothy and Tim. A few months later, Dorothy needed surgery and Shirley and Bill Hand agreed to take Tim. Tim lived with them a few months until Dorothy recovered and we got our family back together. I will be forever thankful to Bill and Shirley. Tracy graduated from high school and went to Des Moines area Community College at Ankeny, IA; Troy graduated from high school and attended Iowa State College. About that time, in 1982, we got word that Yellow Freight would move all road drivers out of Des Moines. We had a choice of 19 different cities we could move to. I chose Kansas City because it was nearest to where Tracy and Troy were. Dorothy had required two more surgeries to resection her colon; one in Ames, IA and the other was in Liberty, MO. I bought a house in Holt, MO from HUD on a bid and got the bid. I moved in, worked the house over; painted, carpeted, and anything that needed to be changed. Soon after, Dorothy, Toby and Tim moved to Holt. Shortly, after that we became active members of Northern Hills Baptist Church, and have been there ever since. We have made lifetime friends and supporters through the church.

Dorothy never liked the surroundings at Holt, so we purchased a lot in Riverbend Estates, Kearney, MO and asked Nick Whiteman to build us a home. During the year or so it took to build this new home, we rented a duplex in “the ghetto,” 1300 Laurel St., Kearney. Tim always said there were 70+ kids in one block, and we were glad to get out of there when the house was finished. The new house was in as nice an area as I have ever lived in. By now, Tim had started college at MU, Columbia and Toby was gone.

Colon cancer began to take its toll on Dorothy in 1991, and she passed away in May, 1992. I missed her terribly. She died at University of Kansas Hospital. We had a funeral service at Northern Hills Baptist Church, Holt, MO and one at Collins Christian Church in Collins, Iowa. She was buried at Evergreen Cemetery in Collins. I had no one at home to do anything for. I didn't want to go home so I chose the longest road trips at work; Memphis, Dallas that would keep me away from home.

It didn't take me long to realize I needed a companion. God brought Barbara Shaw into my life in August, 1992. She also had lost her mate months earlier, was also employed at Yellow Freight in the office and was a sister to Billie Sue Power, who attended our church. We met for coffee one day at Denny's and decided we could support each other through our friendship. We married on June 5, 1993 at Northern Hills Baptist Church and honeymooned on the USS Seaward on a Caribbean Cruise. When we returned, a task was ahead of us; how to incorporate two households into one. We had four cars, two trucks, two boats, and household items to incorporate into one house. We sold stuff, gave some away and filled one house. I retired in 1995 and Barb retired in 1997.

Zee Marie Thornton came to live with us in 2002 at the age of 5 as she had no one to care for her and we applied for guardianship. Zee is the third child of Toby and her mother is Avery Morris. She went to live with her mother who married Brian Weathington in 2011 as my health had been failing and we were unable to take care of her properly.

We lived there for 15 years. Barb's mother, Joyce, moved in with us and lived with us two years. We remodeled the dining room upstairs to provide a bedroom for her. We endured a flood, and finally the abundance of leaves and yard work became too much for us to take care of. We decided that we needed something that would be more compatible for the elderly. We sold the house with many disappointments, and built a new house in the city of Kearney at 1706 Rockwater Lane that had wide doorways, wide hallways, 17" toilets, and no basement or steps. We moved in on August 2, 2008. Joyce was unable to move in with us as she passed away one week before we moved.

We have been very content here. We liked the neighborhood and we continued to live our lives as God directs. We have many great friends here in the city and in our church and we cherish those relationships.