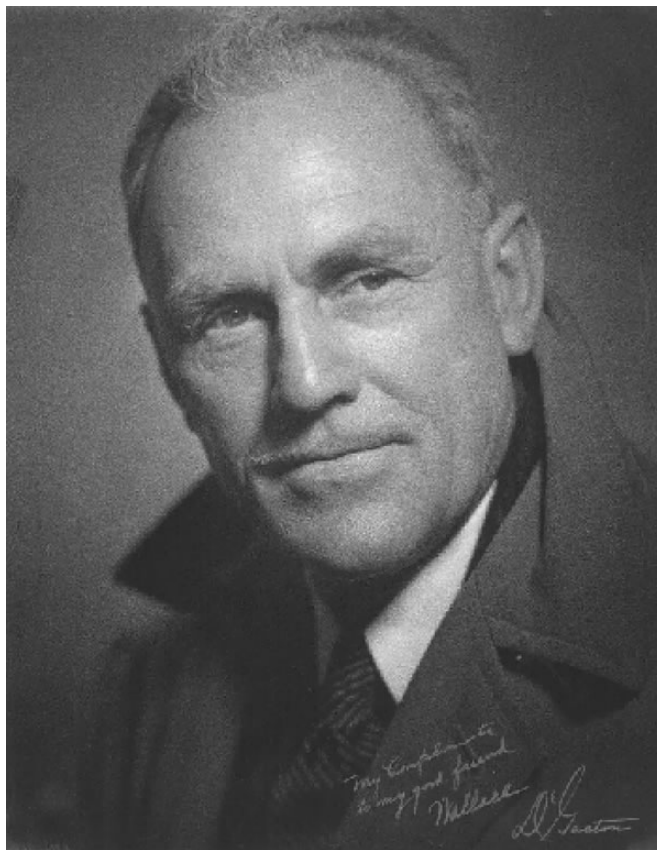


Trueblood/Silver Greyhounds Part Three

PART THREE: MY TURN

by Felicity Trueblood, March 2017



Wallace Hamilton, San Diego, 1950

It's Nice To Get Up in the Mornin'

Written by Sir Harry Lauder, Published 1914

*O! It's nice to get up in the mornin' when the sun begins to shine, At
four or five or six o'clock in the good old summer time.*

When the snow is snowin' and it's murky over head,

O! it's nice to get up in the mornin', but it's nicer to lie in bed.

Growing up, I was awakened most mornings by this verse, cheerfully sung by my dad in a practiced Scottish brogue. I assumed it must have been some old rhyme handed down from my Scotch Irish ancestors. Turns out it was part of a popular song from World War I. I realize now that I grew up in the shadow of that era, of that war, of the person most responsible for shaping my life. My father was born in August of 1890. I was born in July of 1951, almost 61 years later. He had married for the first time the year before. My mother was in her early 40's and had been previously married but had no children. No one ever said so, but I am sure they were not prepared in any way for my arrival!

These unusual circumstances made, predictably, for a most unusual childhood. I vaguely knew that my father used to be someone else, a Cavalry officer, a man who could stand on the back of a horse, a man who loved to sketch, draw, paint, write, sing, dance, cook and tell stories of his life before he became an elderly suburban caregiver to a little girl. Oh, how I longed to have a dad like other dads of the 1950's and early 1960's, a smooth Don Draper dad with a drink in his hand, living in a mid-century modern house in La Jolla. We lived in an apartment in the Bird Rock section of San Diego, on the border of La Jolla, which allowed me to go to La Jolla schools. This meant, of course, that I had a very skewed view of life, my home life versus the life I thought everyone else had. Back then there were all kinds of people living in La Jolla, some rich, some not. I wanted nothing more than to blend in. I did not want a father who looked like a grandfather and wore a dark blue beret when he escorted me to and from school. Now that we are all older, elementary school friends remember fondly that my dad wore a beret and came over after school to teach art. They remember him precisely because he was not like anyone else's dad.

Dad had been a "Draftsman III" at the City of San Diego before I was born. That's where he met my mother, Frieda Udow Abramson, a black hair, blue eyed Jewess from Los Angeles, who was working in the Planning Department. My parents courted along the San Diego Embarcadero and eloped to the Arizona border, so they could marry at midnight the morning of Sep-

tember 15, 1950, the day my mother's divorce became final. They drove to Prescott, woke up a Justice of the Peace, went into town to a saloon, brought back two cowboys as witnesses, and got married. This is exactly how my dad did things – my mother would never have thought of such an arrangement but that's what drew her to him. A love note she wrote to him on her office stationery reads “I love to think of you in your ivory tower, which is more real than most of our houses.” Dad spent half the time during the decade from 1946 – 1956 at the City and half the time self-employed, providing artistic renderings of proposed and existing projects, among them San Diego’s Shelter Island, Mission Bay Park, the post war subdivision of Clairemont, originally named the “Village Within a City”, and a model of the proposed development of the Scripps properties at Miramar Ranch, where I now live.

Dad also designed and produced San Diego’s colorful and much lauded Centennial 1850 – 1950 Annual Report. Just before I was born in July 1951, he was laid off from the City due to “changes in organizational plans”, which curiously coincided with his having reached the age of 60. It was an inopportune time to be having a baby and my parents struggled.



San Diego Centennial Annual Report, 1850 - 1950

[View the Report](#)

In 1953, based on his previous work, Dad was commissioned by James Copley, owner of both local newspapers, to design and build an enormous (8 feet by 16 feet) diorama showing 10,000 square miles of the southwest corner of the United States including Tijuana up to San Juan Capistrano on the north and to the Colorado Basin in the east, as seen from an altitude of 30,000 feet. The project was originally designed to explore the possibilities of a low-level highway through the mountains to the east but was later used as the main exhibit of the “Road Show San Diego” during which the map was shown to business and advertising agency executives in Chicago, New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles. The goal was to dramatize the growth of what Copley called “the most important corner of the U.S.A.”

An article in the San Diego Union, with byline Chicago, dated August 24, 1955, stated that “Wallace F. Hamilton, the designing artist, traveled over 30,000 miles by foot, horseback and car to insure accuracy of detail.” I remember my parents having car trouble on one of those research trips deep into the Los Coyotes Indian Reservation near Warner Springs. They had to walk ten miles with me on my dad’s back, until being rescued late at night by wary members of the tribe.



The map weighed two tons and was in four parts which were reassembled at each destination. We drove to each location in our new light blue Buick sedan, with the map following us in a Bekins moving truck. I had a green and white suitcase filled with toys that I spilled at the entrance to the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles and have a vague memory of sitting by myself at a swanky hotel bar in New York City drinking my soda and admiring the colorful plastic swizzle sticks I had never seen before (having never been anywhere near a bar). In Chicago, my mother took me to a taping of a local children's TV show hosted by Mike Douglas, who would become a famous national talk show host in the following decade. I was chosen from the audi-

SAN DIEGO MODEL RAILROAD MUSEUM, CALIFORNIA
HISTORICAL TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP WITH TOUCHSCREEN KIOSK



ence to come on stage and talk to him. He asked me where I was from and I said “California”. This drew some excitement, as he had not yet been there himself. I wanted to win a tea set but had to settle for a craft kit with yarn and sequins. In New York, no less than Random House publisher and TV personality Bennett Cerf attended the "Road Show". Journalist and life-

long San Diego promoter Neil Morgan was with us on the trip, along with a pretty model named Kay, who would later become his wife. After it's return to San Diego, the map slumbered in a building made for it by the Copley Press. In 1999, it was donated to the San Diego Model Railroad Museum in Balboa Park, displayed outside the entrance where untold numbers of people saw it over the next 15 years. Last I heard, the map was living in dignified retirement at the Imperial Valley Desert Museum in Ocotillo Wells. Dad would have loved that a piece of his art had such a long, distinguished and useful life.

Once I started kindergarten, my mother went back to work, and my dad looked after me. I realize now that my young years were filled with stories of his adventurous past, which were really history lessons in 3D. I would be made to endure lunch with elderly friends after church, followed by a trip to a museum. I wanted to spend the afternoon at the beach like all the other kids. Also, on Sundays, and sometimes during the week, we would stop to visit Dad's sister, Rachel Jane Hamilton Willoughby, nicknamed "Taiche" because it rhymed with Rachel. (Rhyming to these two was as easy as breathing - "Rache - Tache" rhymed, and "Rachel" became "Taiche".) Rachel Jane Hamilton had been the "Songbird of Miami" back in the 1920's. She gave 7,000 performances during her career, including singing at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and in John Phillip Souza's band. Their little brother, Morris Woodburn Hamilton, played the coronet in Souza's band for many years. Uncle Morry and his wife, Grace, went on to become songwriters in New York City, where he composed background music for NBC Radio. When my dad and his sister, a La Jolla social gadfly involved in every civic activity, would get together, they would sing and laugh and relive the past. It all seemed so romantic, out of another era, which it was. My cousin, who was given the official name "Taiche", was 20 years older and remembered a different "Uncle Wallace", one who teased her mercilessly, wrestled with her and taught her to ride horseback. I was small and delicate, and my dad didn't know quite what to do with this creature he was in charge of, except to keep me from all possible harm. I would have loved to know the man my cousin knew.

My solution to my overprotected life was to ask to attend a private boarding school in St. Louis for the last three years of high school. Boarding school turned out to far less restrictive than life at home. In the spring of 1968, our history class was studying World War I and I happened to ask my dad what he did in the war. It had never occurred to me to ask him before. His initial written response, which I shared with my teacher, prompted him to write down the entire story of the Overseas Courier Service, the "Silver Greyhounds", of the American Expeditionary Force, the unit to which he had been assigned in August 1918. At 78, he took out the scrapbook he had kept during the war, having managed to keep this intact throughout all the ensuing years,

and started writing with the help of his Encyclopedia Britannica and his own amazing recall, 50 years later.

When Dad finished his manuscript in June 1968, he sent a copy to Major Amos J. Peaslee, the commanding officer of the Overseas Courier Service, who had been his boss and friend. Major Peaslee expressed pleasure with the story and verified its accuracy. Major Peaslee, had become an internationally recognized Washington D.C. attorney and had himself published a book in 1944 with Admiral Sir Reginald Hall, now out of print, entitled "*Three Wars with Germany*". This book contains copies of Peaslee's correspondence during his time with the Courier Service up until the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. Major Peaslee sent my dad a copy of his book after receiving his manuscript. The Peaslee portion of the book was edited by a former Courier officer and corroborates Dad's story.

That was seemingly the end of the road for the story of the Silver Greyhounds. Dad was still tinkering with the manuscript when he died in April 1972. The potential changes he suggested in those later years were not necessarily for the better. His already colorful prose was becoming so complex as to be difficult to read. He seemed to become lost in a space between reality and imagination. The muse, the art, the music, the words, had always made it difficult for him to keep a steady job but now it had completely overtaken him.

The same year Dad wrote his story, I met Don Trueblood in the summer before my senior year of high school. Don helped me celebrate my 17th birthday. He was 33 and had a Ph.D. in Physics. He had traveled the world and had plans to retire early so he could spend his time adventuring. My mother's sister and her husband suggested that the four of us go to Europe as a high school graduation present, with Don as our guide. This actually happened, and we spent July 1969 traveling by Porsche, trains and planes to 13 countries. That's when I started having my own adventures. We were planning to visit Russia, but Don had been denied a tourist visa, having visited there two years before with his sister to attend the Centennial of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, just for fun. The problem was that he had a government job with a security clearance and the authorities were puzzled as to what he was up to. His solution to the visa problem was for us to fly from Frankfurt to Copenhagen to request transit visas from the Russian consulate there. There were the days before easy access to computers, so Don figured that the consulate in Copenhagen would be somewhat remote and unsuspecting. He was right so, transit visas in hand, we flew to West Berlin and took the train Moscow. We spent several days there dodging the official Soviet tourist agency, Intourist, who couldn't figure out how we got there

and why we wouldn't leave (while we enjoyed a sunrise breakfast at the Rossiya Hotel overlooking Red Square, a dinner cruise on the Moskva River, a folklore ballet at the Bolshoi Theatre, and a visit to a very old synagogue filled with very old Jews). Our host and guide was a Sri Lankan friend Don had made during his last trip. Don's friend, a chemistry student at Moscow University, had been outside the Kremlin when they met, selling furs in which he had smuggled diamonds. When our presence was no longer tolerated, Don boarded a direct Arab Airlines flight to Cairo, while we attempted to fly to Israel. His trip was easy. We, on the other hand, had to fly from Moscow to Prague, from Prague to Zurich, and from Zurich to Tel Aviv, all in one day. The images of that day, a year after the "Prague Spring" uprising and two years after the Israeli Six-Day War, with urbane, neutral Zurich in between, had a profound effect on my young mind. Life with Don Trueblood was not going to be dull and I had more adventures in the next 46 years, the great, the good, and the ones I wish to forget, than I could ever have imagined. Don's family and friends could not quite figure out his attraction to such a young girl but it's apparent to me now that growing up with older parents had made me seem mature beyond my years. I was fascinated by what this man had to offer and had no interest in boys my age. That kind of maturity is an illusion, of course, which only becomes clear after real maturity sets in, but I was ready for an adventure and, norms of the day being what they were in our conservative world, we got married in March of 1970. Don insisted that I get an education and I graduated from the University of California San Diego in 1974 with a degree in Literature, since I thought I was not going to have to work and that reading novels was the best thing I could think of to do in college. We gradually migrated in the direction of Germany, where Don had done post doctorate work and fallen in love with Europe. I lived and worked in Frankfurt for 24 years. In early 2001, after three years in Northern Indiana, I finally returned to San Diego with our young daughter while Don continued to "commute" between Frankfurt and San Diego, right up until a year before his passing in 2016.

This all has a lot to do with my dad's story. During most of our time away, everything we had was in storage at various locations in San Diego. The only thing that really mattered to me was my dad's World War I scrapbook, but I never could seem to find it when we occasionally rummaged through the storage contents. On one visit, we noticed that the storage unit lock had been cut and that things had been stolen. Of course, I didn't think the scrapbook could have been stolen. Why would anyone want it? I eventually came to the sad realization that someone may have taken the box with the scrapbook in it and then emptied it in a dumpster somewhere. I berated myself for losing the one thing that I should have done everything to protect.

I did find Dad's Silver Greyhounds manuscript, along with all his correspondence and other writings, and some letters he had written to his parents during the war. But the scrapbook was gone. Gone were the sketches he had made in the first few days of August 1918, while traveling from where he was stationed near Chateau Thierry during the Second Battle of the Marne, down to Tours, headquarters of the American Expeditionary Force. Gone was the menu from Maxim's we had looked at together. Gone was the wrapper of the Christmas package he received in December 1918 after the Armistice. All gone.

There is a family rumor that we are related on my dad's side to Abigail Adams, wife of President John Adams. I, as the family memory keeper, had spent time investigating but had not yet found a possible link. In 2008, after watching a TV mini-series about John Adams, my interest in solving the mystery was rekindled. I went on the Internet and typed in my great grandfather's name, Francis Wallace Hamilton, which is my dad's name reversed. Up popped a posting on an art website from eight months prior, asking if anyone knew about the World War I trench artwork of Wallace Francis Hamilton! I took a double take and then responded that I was his daughter and what would he like to know. The gentlemen who posted the inquiry had some artwork and scrapbook items that he had "acquired" 12 – 15 years prior and was now thinking of offering for sale. This man was living in Fontana, California, and said that the items had come from underneath the old Kaiser Steel plant there, where stolen loot was often stored. Fontana is close to Highway 15, a straight shot 100 miles north from our storage unit. The current owner of the items thought they might have belonged to Henry Kaiser. I asked him to email me pictures of the sketches and other items. Once I saw the photos, I told Don that these were my lost sketches, since I remembered them very well. He did not believe me. He thought I was planning to tell this gentleman that this was my dad's stolen scrapbook, even though this could not possibly be the case. I was insulted that he thought I would lie about something like this. He, nor anyone else, could believe that the scrapbook could be alive and well in Fontana.

I mulled over what to do and consulted my cousin, a Los Angeles estate attorney. We arranged to meet at this man's home with some cash in my purse, determined not to leave without the scrapbook. The home had cardboard covering all the windows and a bicycle out front with saddlebags and a parasol. A very nice gentleman around my age let us in and brought out the treasures he had enjoyed looking at for so many years. The scrapbook itself was long gone but he had kept the original handle. He had lovingly transferred whatever contents had survived into several large photo albums. The menu from Maxim's and the Christmas package wrapper that I remembered were missing, but all the artwork was there, including some intricate work my dad had done while stationed with the Cavalry along the Mexican border in 1915. There was a

1919 sewer map of Paris, a map of the Paris Metro, and a military map of the port of Le Havre. This gentleman had wondered if the owner of the scrapbook might have been a spy. We exchanged a certain amount of cash and left with the scrapbook in my hands.

I now had everything I needed to tell Wally Hamilton's story, both the manuscript and the artwork. I have thought and thought about this project and had started to transcribe his manuscript several years ago. There were at least three typed versions, all undated, so it was hard to tell which was the final one. I had to incorporate them all and choose which sounded the most clear and consistent with the storyline. I worked on the project here and there between jobs but, when I was working a full-time job, it seemed impossible I would ever finish. I firmly believe I have been nudged along by my dad to retrieve the scrapbook and tell his story. Once the scrapbook was back home, odd things began to happen. The light or the ceiling fan in my office would randomly turn themselves on, which recently has started again. Once, when I was doing genealogy work on my mother's side of the family for an upcoming reunion, the battery-operated pencil sharpener on the desk next to my computer, with a pencil stuck in it, (which no longer worked and had corroded batteries inside) started whirring out of the blue. I pulled out the pencil, put it back in and confirmed that it was, indeed, quite dead. Believe as you wish, but I maintain there has been some collusion in getting me to complete this labor of love just in time for the 100-year Centennial of the U.S. entering World War I. Dad, I heard you. I hope this makes you happy. I saw this quote from Jack London at Wolf House, his home in Glen Ellen, California and it made me think of my father.

