

(Excerpt of Chapter One...)

## LIVING BEYOND IMPOSSIBLE

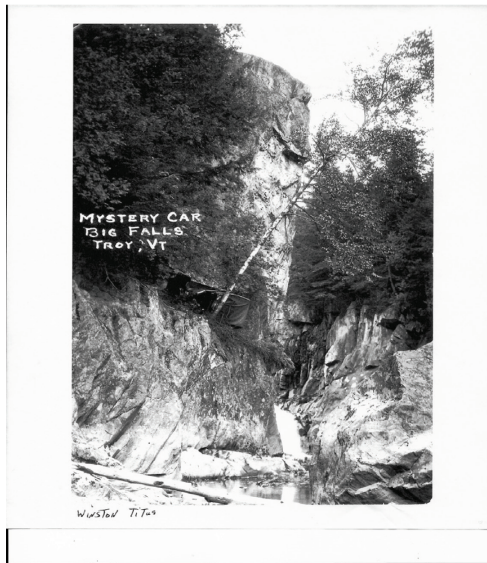
### CHAPTER ONE: Vermonter Spirit

*“I love Vermont because of her hills and valleys, her scenery and invigorating climate, but most of all because of her indomitable people. They are a race of pioneers who have almost beggared themselves to serve others. If the spirit of liberty should vanish in other parts of the Union, and support of our institutions should languish, it could all be replenished from the generous store held by the people of this brave little state of Vermont.”*

— Calvin Coolidge, 30<sup>th</sup> President  
of the United States and a Vermonter.

A dozen years before 1939, during America’s Prohibition and Great Depression era, Vermont rumrunners paid nocturnal visits to Line House taverns built over the border that demarked Canada from America. Listening to their French-Canadian counterparts speak with broken-English accents, they loaded their vehicles with as many illegal, 12-quart-bottle cases of Canadian Molson and

Genesee beers, and hard-liquor cases, bundled in burlap, as they dared. The destination of Barre, Vermont, 70-odd miles south and only seven miles southeast from the state capital at Montpelier, guaranteed a \$125 cash payday to anyone who survived the harrowing, multi-hour trip. Their ventures came with road hazards: seasonal changes, vehicle breakdowns, federal authorities, and local police aiming (literally) to stop them. Of course, their illegal cargo had to arrive intact. Two miles south of the border, the lone, unpaved roadway they traversed ran through the village of North Troy. Under daylight, most of these desperately courageous, albeit illicit, nocturnal entrepreneurs lived and worked regular jobs at the venerable iron-works furnace a few miles away, or the North Troy veneer mill. As parents, they wished for better opportunities, fortunes, and circumstances for their children, for whom they risked life and limb in pursuit of those goals.



*overturned rumrunner vehicle*

\* \* \*

On February 27, 1939, a new Vermonter born of the same intrepid stock and stolid character as his bootlegging ancestors weighed in at only “2.7 pounds.” He was *not* a Premie, according to the birth certificate filled out by one of the nurses at Mary Fletcher Hospital situated 74 miles southwest of North Troy in Burlington. No fanfare heralded the event that cloudy winter day. Instead, a slight chance of rain threatened to dampen the surrounding snow-blanketed, fogbound mountains and valleys.

This tiny infant’s entry into this harsh world generated immediate thoughts: Where is this place? Why am I here? Gee, it’s kind of chilly... Yikes, cold hands! And, hey, too-bright lights!

Soon enough, someone declared, “It’s a boy!”

Yup, you betcha, that’s me!

His mother named her child “Terrance” from the Sabine peoples’ word, *terenus*, meaning “soft.” Having a Latin origin, *terens*, it also means “one who grinds or threshes.” Appropriately, his personality fits both descriptions: he was and is today, a soft-spoken person iron-willed to confront and do hard work in the face of myriad adversities, who would come to be called “Terry” by just about anyone who ever knew him.

Terry’s first “home” was the top drawer of his 24-year-old mother’s wooden dresser in her bedroom. Tiny, he fit in nicely, hoping no one would ever decide to close the drawer and forget him. Home also was a modest apartment consisting of one bedroom, a sitting room, and a tiny kitchen. Most days, the atmosphere there was comfortable and quiet enough, since his father, an electrician, was gone from the house for many hours at a time.

In his earliest years, as his perceptions widened and his body grew, Terry figured out that his mother, an artist, liked

wearing cooking aprons over colorful sundresses. Not the best cook, Genevieve Hitchcock (nee McWilliams) tried her best in the kitchen. The first Thanksgiving after her son's birth, while surrounded by family and invited friends eager to celebrate a feast of roast turkey with stuffing—“dressing” to Vermonters—and mashed potatoes drizzled with turkey-stock gravy, she served the main dish with the innards in the original packaging still inside of the bird!

In all fairness to the woman, culinary mistakes could be forgiven because of her prowess in another area of life: she was a superb pianist. In fact, earlier she had hosted her own radio show and performed on-air concerts. Other times, she performed at large-facility, public events. On the strength of her growing reputation, she auditioned for a Broadway play in the Big Apple. During countrywide auditions set up to find a Daisy Mae for the forthcoming production of *L'il Abner* based on the Al Capp comic strip of the same name, she took Second Place—a remarkable feat for a young, adopted, single girl, visiting the entertainment capital of the world for the first time!



Terry's Dad &  
Mom

A beauty with blonde hair and blue eyes, Genevieve's million-dollar smile was made of (as the infant Terry thought of them) *bright-white teeth that constantly encourage me with their messages*: “You're such a beautiful boy... we are so lucky to have you... you're special... you're going to remember that life is for living.”

Kind words from his artistic mother were not only music to his small ears, but also loving expressions of how to grow up and survive. Soon enough, the toddler

would have to endure and question in silence several hardships, including his biological parents' constant arguments.

Grown from dresser-drawer to high-chair status, his world had changed and widened; inevitably so, despite all not being right in the household. His limited world-view came replete with high-pitched yelling and non-understandable confrontations followed by flowing tears, some of which rolled down his small cheeks. Wanting to return to the warmth and relative quiet of that "other home" he had left at birth, he craved solace in those dark moments. Eventually, he retreated to an inner world of music. Listening to the radio drowned out his parents' harsh voices and terribly loud cacophonies. As his years accumulated, he found safety by curling up like a cat on a soft armchair next to the radio in the living room, hoping that his constant fear of being abandoned would lessen. A simple hug, a few words of encouragement that all would be alright, that he would always be cared for, would have sufficed.



*a childhood friend & Terry*

Hopelessness in such a small child was such a waste of his talents, spirit, and potential. While it's true the welfare of any child at any time guarantees the future conditions of our

world, in his time it was almost impossible to imagine an accomplished pianist and a journeyman electrician living together in constant harmony.

Something had to break. When it did, it wasn't good...