

And upon such things...

157 years ago, on March 21, 1849, in Pratt City, near Newberry Corners, Alabama, a son was born to Isaac and Jane Newberry. They named him Zachary Taylor Newberry. He was the first of their five sons.

When young Zachary was about 12, the Civil War broke out, and father Isaac, a true patriot of the south, quickly took up arms and joined the Confederate forces. He was just as quickly killed in battle, leaving Jane with a houseful of toddling children.

Zachary helped his mother raise the brood and built a life of his own, eventually becoming respected enough to marry the daughter of a Confederate officer, the good Doctor Benjamin Franklin, one of the most revered men in the area.

Zachary's bride, Julia Ann Josephine Franklin, was six years his junior, but that difference in ages was considered trivial in the context of the times. Looking ever forward, they set out to build a family.

Eventually, Zachary decided to seek a future in the newly expanding west, so he loaded up his young wife and headed for Texas. There, on February 7, 1876, Lucy Jane Newberry, the first of two children, was born.

The couple soon added a son, Hale Newberry. As the children arrived and the family grew, it seemed that the Newberrys would long be Texans.

Living near Austin, a major commercial and government center of the times, opportunity was everywhere. If a man was going to be successful, he could certainly find the ways and means to do so there.

But as time wore on, things deteriorated in the marriage. Soon Julia was ready to return to her familiar home in Alabama. Zachary took Julia and the children the 40 miles to the railroad so she could return home, and the couple separated forever.

Seeking a fresh start and a new life, Zachary loaded his possessions into a covered wagon and headed out to find fertile lands upon which he could plant the seeds of a new future. He headed Northeast, away from the scorching summers of Austin that had turned his fertile marriage into a dry husk, towards the cool highlands of the central mountains.

In the early 1880s, over the horizon of the foothills in northwest Arkansas came a covered wagon, a man with steady and strong hands at the reigns. He scouted the area for good lands and found them near East Cadron Creek. He purchased the land, the best he could find in the Cold Spring bottom lands, from the Little Rock & Fort Smith railroad.

He was obviously a man of means, but he never spoke of his past, of where he made his fortune or of whence he came. His past was a mystery, and the rumors in the small community of Acklin Gap ran rampant. But after a few years they moved on to fresher material, and as Zachary Taylor Newberry built his house and his lands, he eventually became just another homesteader, albeit one with a mysterious and quiet past.

Once equipped with a productive farm and its accompanying livelihood, a secure and safe home built by his own hands, and most importantly, a new life to call his own, his wounds of the past finally healed. So endowed, he set out to find a new bride.



Dr. Benjamin Franklin



Julia Ann Josephine Franklin (1854-1894)

In the neighboring community of Holland, he met young Margarett Loular Bass. Though one would not know it by her current surroundings, her family stretched back to William Basse, born in France in 1520. Nonetheless, Zachary enchanted the young Margarett, some 27 years his junior. Even for that day, an almost three decade difference in age was notable.



Zachary Taylor Newberry
Margarett Loular Bass Newberry

Looking more like father and daughter, or even grandfather and granddaughter, Zachary and "Lou" were married in 1894 and soon began to produce a family. In all 12 children were born of the union. Most survived childhood, no mean feat in that day and age.

Of all the triumphs and tragedies of the Newberry offspring, perhaps none could be more bittersweet than Forun, their fifth child, born April 4, 1911. Equipped with his father's sense of entrepreneurship and innovation and his mother's boundless energy, his future seemed bright and limitless.

Young Forun met and married Lois Powell, and despite the demands of building his own farm, they quickly found prosperity while building a family around three daughters. The earliest, Carol Ann, was born in 1936, followed by Brenda in 1941 and the youngest, Wanda, in 1943.

By then Forun had turned his modest holdings into a prosperous business and was one of the most successful agricultural producers in the area. Always seeking innovation, he was the first in the entire region to purchase and use a tractor, thus exponentially expanding his ability to produce crops with limited manpower.

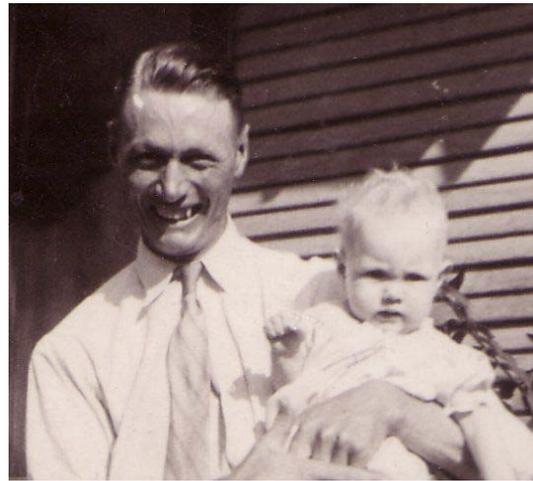
And then, tragedy. Forun contracted a kidney disorder, Bright's Disease, which is now termed chronic nephritis. Racked by back pain, vomiting and fever, the young, energetic and athletic young father soon displayed the accompanying symptoms of Edema, including swelling and puffiness of his face and body.

In a scene played out all too often in those times of limited medical knowledge and ability in rural communities, Forun Newberry, only 33, died a tragic death of a medical ailment that would be easily treatable today by even the remotest of small town physicians. His death from lack of medical knowledge was a tragic irony given his father Zachary's former father-in-law Benjamin Franklin's profession of medical doctor back in Alabama.

As it was, young widow Lois found a way to overcome the disparaging taunts and predictions of disaster of the men at the cotton gin and brought in that year's crops. Bag by bag, the cotton was hand picked and hauled by team and wagon to the gin. Basket by basket the vegetables were gathered and preserved. The land, tractor, horses and equipment were sold and Lois took the three girls, the two youngest still in diapers, into the town of Conway, where a young widow might find work and a way to support her family.

There she found a small stone house with a large lot suitable for a working garden, a cash job as a waitress in a roadside café and eventually, a returning veteran from the World War that had ravaged everything outside their former quiet and insular confines of the small world of the Newberry homestead at Acklin Gap.

Her veteran, Lovidee Zane Strickland, grew up in the area, but never knew Lois. He was from the Naylor and Vilonia area, a stone's throw away from Lois' childhood by metropolitan measures but a light year by rural standards. Before that day, their paths never crossed.



Forun Newberry holding Carol Ann Newberry



Forun Newberry



Lois Powell
Newberry Strickland

A tender youth when the war broke out, when he walked into her post-war café with a couple of local buddies he showed the clear effects of what four straight years of combat, from North Africa to the liberation of the German death camps, could do to a crack-shot kid raised on rural morals and a scope of experiences measured in creeks and hollows rather than continents and countries.

He was a natural with guns, so became an instructor right out of boot camp, a safe and secure state-side posting that he could have used to keep himself out of harm's way and surrounded by all the girls left alone by the waves of GIs heading overseas at the time. Instead, he volunteered for overseas duty and found himself on a transport ship for North Africa and the initial battles of WWII between green U.S. troops and the practiced and professional soldiers from the German Wehrmacht of Erwin Johannes Eugen Rommel, The Desert Fox.



Lovidee Zane Strickland

During the long and bitter North African Campaign young "Strick" was once assigned to guard prisoners of war and then informed of the new order of "take no prisoners." This cold reality of war turned the young Arkansas hunter into a healer, and he became a combat medic. The sharpshooter headed into the remaining battles of Sicily, Italy, France and Germany armed with nothing more than his medical kit stuffed with bandages, sulfa and morphine.



Lovidee Zane Strickland
circa 1946

All the way across Europe he rescued bleeding comrades, treating their wounds as bullets and shrapnel whistled overhead. Caught in the icebox of Belgium, he was briefly taken prisoner during the Battle of the Bulge, only to escape back to friendly lines. His final unit, the 3rd Armored Division, the Spearhead, was the first to cross the Rhine River into the German heartland. He fought the last desperate battles for the Fatherland and lived through the horrors of the final suicide charges of armed German children and the liberation of the Nordhausen death camp.

He left the backwoods of his home a vibrant young man who had never even seen a city as big as Little Rock and returned a battle hardened, world weary, tough SOB who would never again experience the litmus test clarity, the random death, and equally random survival, of the battlefields.

He and Lois married and had a son, Rick, in 1950. Moving north to seek work, they settled in Iowa, earning a steady paycheck at the Maytag plant. Day after day, they produced washing machines, many of which were sent overseas to the countries rebuilding from the ravages of war, much as he was. His was a long and slow process, tough on those around him, but tougher still on himself. Only in his later years would he make peace with his silent memories.

A double bronze star medal winner, he was the living example of the rule of "those that saw most talked the least." Except for very rare moments with other veterans of intense combat, his history remained as silent and enigmatic as Zachary Taylor Newberry's had before him.

One day in Texas, a young family split apart. Julia Franklin Newberry headed back home to Alabama, where she married Bob Wells and had three more children. Zachary Taylor Newberry headed for a new life in Arkansas. His daughter by Julia, Lucy Jane Newberry, died on July 29, 1984, at the age of 108, having never seen her father Zachary again once her train pulled out of that Texas station.

One day in Texas one family ended. One day in Texas another family began. If both of those events had not happened, I, and many of you reading this, would never have been.

And upon such things lives, families and histories are made. And upon such things...