

INTRODUCTION

John L. “Doc” Lawler (1904-1972) started life as a member of a street gang in the Kerry Patch, St. Louis’ impoverished Irish-Catholic ghetto. Sixty-seven years later he was remembered for becoming one of the most influential union and political leaders the city of St. Louis had ever seen. Jerome T. Y. Shen, M.D. (1918-) was born into great wealth, but had to leave his family fortune behind when he fled, and barely escaped, the Communist takeover in his hometown of Shanghai, China. After arriving in St. Louis without a license to practice medicine in Missouri, he would become a friend to Mother Theresa and a well-known leader of the Pro-Life movement in St. Louis.

It doesn’t take long to figure out that the lives of Doc Lawler and Jerome Shen are extremely different. It also won’t take long to figure out that the ways in which this narrative talks about the lives of Doc and Jerome are very different. The main source for information about Doc Lawler are hundreds of newspaper articles from the biased *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*. The majority of information about Jerome came from a series of interviews with him and his wife, Theresa. Given these very different sources, and given the seeming lack of similarities in their lives, the question can be asked: Why write about them together in a dual narrative? Why not write two different narratives and get to know each man separately?

The quickest answer is to point to December 13, 1976, when Doc’s youngest daughter Bridget married Jerome’s oldest son, Jerry. Though Doc had died in 1972, and was therefore not at the wedding to meet Dr. Shen in person, their lives had been brought together through their children. When Bridget and Jerry’s sons were born, in 1977 and 1979, the biological combination had been made as well. One might agree, then, that a dual narrative is in order because the lives of Doc and Jerome exist together within their mutual grandsons. This is the easiest answer, but it’s not a very compelling one. For if this were the only reason offered, then why not record two separate stories and simply stick them back-to-back in the same book?

The reason that a dual narrative is appropriate is that exploring the lives of Doc Lawler and Jerome Shen is more than a singular search for personal meaning. This is not a narrative guided by me simply asking, “How am I a mix of my grandfathers’ personalities?” This is a narrative about getting to know Doc and Jerome. It’s about their lives, but it’s also about stories: the way we tell them, the way we remember them, the people who tell them, the way we pass them down to younger generations. It is a story that includes families, religion, immigration, the FBI, the Supreme Court, Mother Theresa, and a host of other colorful characters. It is a story not yet finished, a story which grows today, not only in the form of eighty-two year old Jerome Shen, but in the lives of the children and grandchildren who trace their roots to these two men. It is a partial, dual, biographical narrative. But more simply, it is a story I want to tell to my own children someday.

How we tell stories to future generations – and just as importantly, how we remember the stories we’ve been told – are at the heart of this narrative. How stories are told and remembered depends a lot on who tells them. In this narrative, there are several different story tellers. **1.** First, there is Jerome Shen himself. Speaking in a series of interviews with me, Jerome and his wife Theresa, tell their own story. The positive aspect of this kind of story-telling is that Jerome was present for everything that happened to him; the problem with telling your own story is that you have a bias toward making yourself look good. (Just recall the last time you explained a stupid mistake to a friend. You are able to craft the story to make yourself seem like less of an idiot, or to make the whole experience something to laugh at.) **2.** Since Doc Lawler is no longer living, and since many of the people he knew best are also dead or very old, the primary story-teller about Doc is the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*. While the *Globe-Democrat* offered great coverage of local politics while Doc was alive, it was also a paper with conservative political motivations. Pat Buchanan wrote for the paper from 1962-65, and they were consistently interested in trashing Doc’s image. This bias will be considered in the narrative. **3.** A

third story-teller will be Doc, through a series of letters he wrote to his daughter Bridget in 1966 and 1967. These letters, together with letters from Doc's wife, offer an intimate view into Doc's life. The way Doc and Babe tell their own stories vary considerably from the stories of the *Globe-Democrat*. **4.** Other story tellers will appear in different places. Stories will come from friends and family of Doc and Jerome, but the narrative will also consider how these two men are parts of larger stories. How did class struggles, immigrant life, and the Catholic Church play a role in each man's life? We will see a number of conflicting stories, and it is the ultimate job of this biographical narrative to sort them out, evaluate them, and offer a conclusion about the character of each man.

The narrative is not structured chronologically, but in an order which is designed to highlight the issues central to Jerome and Doc. This is also a *partial* narrative, meaning that substantial amounts of information about both men are not included. But just because it doesn't detail every election or every volunteer role doesn't mean that the narrative is necessarily incomplete. For getting to know someone is not so much about getting to know everything they've done, but instead learning about their character. Jerome and Doc's personal histories are not ends, but steps we can take to gain a better understanding of who each man was. In this narrative the underlying questions are, "*What* principles were Doc and Jerome negotiating, lobbying, and fighting for? *Who* did they work with and against? *How* did they go about their public and personal lives? *Why* did they make the decisions they did?" Once we explore these questions, we can evaluate the answers. Do Doc and Jerome deserve our criticism or our praise?

This narrative tells a story that both men were a part of, but neither man was aware of. The Lawler-Shen story was realized when their children were married and when their grandsons were born. But the Lawler-Shen story did not start with that marriage in 1976. It started when both men were born. It is precisely because Doc and Jerome lived their lives unaware of the dual Lawler-Shen story that this narrative can serve a special

function. *Doc and the Doctor* is a story we must piece together. It is not only a story Doc or Jerome have told, but a story they have *lived*.