

PREFACE

It wasn't until Spring 1999, when I took a course called "Writing Biography," that I thought about writing a biography of my grandfathers. I had known "Grandpa" (Dr. Jerome T. Y. Shen) all my life, but it had never occurred to me that I should write something about him. Perhaps because I did know him for so long, I didn't see any reason to write about him. My academic training had taught me that what's interesting to write about are problematic questions and issues that can be debated. Why write about someone I already knew so well? Although my other grandfather, Doc Lawler, died before I was born, I think the same logic held. I had never met Doc, but I had heard stories from my mother and from my grandmother, and I thought that I knew what he was like. Especially after my grandmother Lawler died in 1989, I think Doc wasn't on my mental map. He was as much a stranger as most people on the street, so why write about something that didn't appear to be very interesting? Before the Spring of 1999, the idea of writing about Doc and Jerome was not in my head. But now it's Spring 2000, and I have a narrative here on both men, as well as additional parts of a 120 page rough draft which I hope one day to expand into a book. So what happened?

I think it was a combination of two things. First, and I will offer my formal thanks at the end of this Preface, Tracy Wiener's class, "Writing Biography," introduced me to a style of writing that I had not considered before. Before the class, I had never paid much attention to the subtleties in and the creation of biographical narratives. I just thought biographies told the story of somebody's life, end of story. But as I moved through the class, I realized that biographies involved much more. They were part analytical paper, examining a problem, and they were also part creative writing, describing a person's life in colorful detail. They drew on a variety of disciplines: religion, political science, law, English, and so many more. The first thing that happened, then, was a new awareness of the possibilities of biography.

This new awareness of what biography could do complemented a growing appreciation I was feeling for the blessings in my life. Perhaps it was my twenty-first birthday earlier in the school year, or perhaps the realization that I was soon going to be graduating from college, but in Spring of 1999, I began to more fully appreciate all the wonderful aspects of my life. I thought about the opportunities I had been given and the talents I had been blessed with. Most of all, I thought about the people who I had met in my twenty-some odd years. I also thought a lot about what it means for me to “know” someone, or what it means to have someone “know” me. It was in this line of thinking where the second change, my gratitude for the people in my life, matched up perfectly with my new interest in biography.

It seems to me that biography is about getting to know someone. But what does it mean to know someone? For instance, you might say to me, “You know that group, The Beatles, right?” And I would of course, answer “Yes, I know the Beatles.” But what I really know are some things about The Beatles. I know the names of the group members, some of their songs, and (much to the chagrin of those who must listen to me sing along) some of the lyrics as well. But I don’t really know much else. If you were writing a biography of The Beatles, you wouldn’t come and interview me. You would go and talk to people who really *knew* The Beatles. And you and I would know what you mean by that. You are going to talk to people who lived with them, talked with them regularly, played music with them.

The more I think about this idea and discuss it with friends, the more important I think it is. It’s something that hits close to home. I can ask myself, for instance, a series of introspective questions: Who is the Francis Shen my parents know? Who is the Francis Shen my professors know? Who is the Francis Shen my brother knows? Who is the Francis Shen my high school friends know? Who is the Francis Shen my girlfriend knows? Who is the Francis Shen that God knows? Who is the Francis Shen I want the world to know? The answers to these questions are different, but somewhere in the mess

is the genuine Francis Shen, the person I really am. But that is enough about The Beatles and about Francis Shen. The point I want to make is that knowing someone doesn't mean you *know* them.

With this idea fresh in my mind, I realized that I knew Grandpa and I knew about Doc Lawler, but I didn't *know* them. I also realized that biography was all about getting to know people, uncovering their genuine character, and finding out what is most essentially them. The answer is what you are about to read: a dual biographical narrative of John L. "Doc" Lawler and Jerome T. Y. Shen. My hope is that after reading this, you will know both Doc and the Doctor a little bit better. Maybe you'll even want to know more.

While the idea for undertaking this biography project may have come from my class and the ideas bouncing around in my head, it's still true, as my father likes to say, that "Ideas are a dime a dozen." This idea would not have become a real project if it had not been for the help of many people along the way.

Tracy Weiner, in the University of Chicago's Writing Program, taught "Writing Biography" in Spring 1999. She has been my strongest supporter on the project from the first time I approached her about it a year ago. She has provided fantastic advice and suggestions at every juncture, and it is not an overstatement to say that without her support and guidance, this narrative would not have taken shape. I cannot say enough about the help I have received. From research to rough draft to revisions and to a final form, Tracy has been a guiding light.

Although it took me a while to find her, Neda Ulaby has also provided great feedback on the rough draft and subsequent revisions. Her "reassure mode" reassured me exactly when I needed it. Professor Joshua Scodel and Maria Parks in the Department of English were very understanding and helpful when I showed up late to the BA process. My research would not have been possible if not for a grant from the Richter Grant Foundation. My thanks to them, and to the University of Chicago for the funds. Staff at the University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL) Mercantile Library were also very friendly

and helpful as I poured through old newspaper articles on Doc Lawler. The Missouri Historical Society also provided a great research environment. Special thanks to John Waide at the St. Louis University Pius V Library for looking up an obscure fact that I needed to find.

Certainly one of the greatest joys of the project have been the interviews I've conducted over the past nine months. Special thanks to Prof. Lana Stein (UMSL), Prof. Robert Salisbury (Washington University in St. Louis), Former Senator Thomas F. Eagleton (D-MO), Former Missouri Governor Warren Hearnes, John Angelides, and Joe Roddy. Everyone I spoke with was very encouraging about the project.

I need to thank also my friends and family who have helped me along the way. My mother, Bridget Brennan, was not only a great primary source of information about her father, Doc Lawler, but also accomplished a lot of leg work for me back in St. Louis. Thanks, Mom, for all the help. Thanks also my father for "being the Perr." My brother has been a constant source of support and encouragement as well. Thanks to all of my friends in Chicago and St. Louis for listening to me moan for an entire year. Thank you to Rory, Jess, Matt, Rhaina, Bill, CB, and my Renegades partner, Mr. Flynn, for listening.

Finally, thank you to my grandparents, Jerome T. Y. and Theresa Shen, for talking with me at length. Their willingness to share their pasts has enriched my life, as well as made this narrative possible. Jerome has always maintained, "Someone should write a book about our lives." As I said before, this is only a partial narrative, and there is a lot of research I hope to complete in order to one day write that book. But until then. Grandpa, here's a start.