



Text Version of Audio Story: Harry

Old Harry lived all alone, sort of like a hermit, back on the mountain road.

I guess it's been about a year since he died ... knew him for as long as I can remember. He was a fruit farmer ... peddled his produce at a roadside stand. The house where he lived was falling down all around him. It was a good-sized house, but he only lived in two rooms: the kitchen and then a room off to the side, where he would sleep.

I was fascinated by old Harry. It seemed he liked people — and most people liked him. But, unfortunately, there was a segment of local society that looked down upon him because he was so different.

Harry would stop at my dad's place of business. He would always ask to read my dad's Wall Street Journal. You could just sort of see him dreaming as he looked over the stock quotes ... that perhaps if life would have been different if ... If he wouldn't have been such a timid person, maybe ... maybe he would have been a trader on Wall Street.

I'd kid him about it, and he would politely explain to me that the world of finance was just too complicated a matter for him. We all tried to reach out to this incredibly shy man ... a fabulous person to engage in conversation.

I guess I got as close to him as anyone could. Anyone, that is, except for the love of his life, Esther.

Everyone called her Essie. Their courtship lasted more than 50 years ... never tied the knot.

Some folks say Esther's mother didn't approve of Harry. He wasn't good enough and had no prospects. He drove old beat-up cars, dressed in tattered work clothes. I think if the truth were known, Harry was just too backwards to ask for Esther's hand. That's what I want to believe anyhow.

A year or so before old Harry died, I found him parked along old Route 22. I knew something was wrong, so I stopped.

Harry was lost. It was a road he knew well. He didn't recognize me, either. When I said my name, my lifelong friend reached his hand out, shaking mine. He said, "I am terribly sorry stranger, I don't recall we ever met." It wasn't long after that, they took Harry's old car, and he ended up in a nursing home. Essie ended up in the same nursing home. She actually died before he did, but because of the Alzheimer's, Harry didn't even realize she was gone.

When I think back on our friendship and the many lunches we ate together, one thing stands out. I never heard Harry utter a negative word about anyone or anything. I don't think he knew how.

When Harry died, his frail sister from out of town showed up. She wanted to do right by her brother. She wanted to be sure that he wouldn't be buried in a pauper's grave. The undertaker informed her that she would receive two free death certificates to settle the estate — any more than that, she would have to pay for. She said, "Two will be fine. I have to watch my pennies."

Within a week, the old sister had made a few discoveries and had to return to the mortuary. She informed the undertaker that she needed at least fifty more death certificates to settle Harry's estate.

My old friend — the one who some folks looked down on ... the man who some had said had no prospects. The same man who had told me that the world of high finance just didn't fit in his head.

My old friend Harry had secretly, quietly, parlayed the nickels and dimes and quarters from his little fruit stand into a personal fortune, valued in the millions.

From the Juniata Valley, I'm the American Storyteller.