

A Letter from Irving Randolph Stubbs To First Cousins (November 2003)

At 76, you look back and remember. Fortunately, I think that the Creator programmed us to remember more of the good than the bad. I have a lot of good memories about a lot of things. Since our last reunion, I have remembered a lot of good things about our family. These notes are not an inventory of those memories, but are rambling reflections on our identity as I see it.

My earliest memories of our clan are from our visits to Pinetown where we caught up with Granddaddy, Ethel, Arleese, and James. This was my first exposure to a farm and farm life. Granddaddy always reached out to the younger ones and introduced them to tractors and things that he had made. I remember him as a generous and caring person.

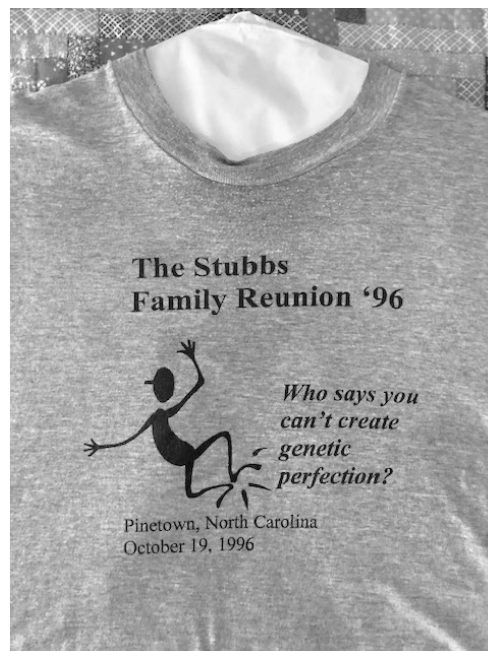
There were also reunions in Pinetown when we met more of the uncles, aunts and cousins. I don't have graphic memories of what happened at those reunions except that we always ate well and people seemed to be happy to catch up with each other. I also remember how many members of the family took care of other members who needed to be taken care of.

As I grew up, I got to know some of the uncles and aunts better. Tommy spent some time in Norfolk and I got to know him when he was there. He befriended me and took me places that I had never been before. I remember Elwood from visits to Washington and my fascination in getting to know a real milkman. We got to know R.L. and his family better after they moved to Williamsburg. We exchanged more frequent visits and it was neat to know someone who did special things in Williamsburg. After all, how many people do we know who knew John D. Rockefeller?

When my family moved to Williamsburg, we got to know R.L. and Barbara better, and when he died, I was honored to conduct R.L.'s funeral. I never got to know Archie well at all. I am sorry for that, but am happy to get to know some of his children better. I remember Arleese's red hair (I had that also.), and her smile and the way she (after Ethel) took care of James. My uncle James is five years younger than I am. It is hard to think of him as my uncle. Our paths have crossed from time to time, but I have not had the occasion to get to know him and his family.

I skipped Ethel in the sequence for a reason. Of all my father's siblings, I have come to know Ethel best of all. She was the hostess of our early visits to Pinetown, but there was another connection that makes her special in my memory book. Ann and I met when I was at Davidson College. When I graduated in 1951, I went to Princeton to begin my seminary work. Ann went to Richmond to begin her work at RPI that is now VCU. We were serious about our relationship and planned to be married. Trips between Princeton and Richmond were a challenge for students. Ethel allowed us to converge in Washington and stay with her. This was before Robert and Jackie. She was very gracious to us and provided a very happy environment for Ann and me to work out our final wedding plans. Ann and I were married in 1952. Ever since then, Ethel has been for me the key link to my father's side of the family and the glue that bonded us together.

Ethel gathered us together in 1991 in Chevy Chase for the first in our more recent reunions. Dennis and Carol hosted the next one the next year at their home in Upper Marlboro. In 1993, we gathered at the home of Terry and Joe in Orleans. Mary Martha and I arranged for our gathering in Yorktown in 1994. (In this experience, I learned what a tough job it can be to host a family reunion - and, I also learned what a great and able person Mary Martha is.)



It was designed by Eric Peele, Arlene's Son.

We skipped a few years, and the "home-base" folks reunited us in Pinetown. (I am still wearing my T-Shirt from that event with the slogan on it, "Who says you can't create genetic perfection." We take pride in our family.) Eric and Kim hosted the next in 1998 in Raleigh. We coasted for a few years until this year when Teresa and Dennis gathered us for that festive event at the Upper Marlboro Hunt Club.

The reunions are reminders that we care about each other. At the reunions there are always examples of looking after our needs and interests. This year, special arrangements were made to encourage the children to want to come to future reunions. My mother, now 97, was made very welcome and comfortable and she very much enjoyed being there. This reunion kindled my interest to strengthen my ties to my Stubbs first cousins.

Since then, we have experienced and continue to experience some tough times for family members. It is not easy to show the degree of caring that many of us feel at these times, but we are trying. Staying connected by email, should help us to know sooner about special family needs. Many of us have reached the age at which we recognize that even small acts of caring at crisis times can mean a lot.

Many years ago, I asked Jane to work on our family history. She kindly accepted the challenge, but I am not sure that she has fully forgiven me for getting her involved in what turned out to be a major undertaking. She has done work on both sides of our family but the most extensive has been on the Stubbs side. She has made many, many trips and visits to court houses, libraries, and cemeteries. She has been in touch with scores of family members including many of you and has exchanged notes with many co-genealogists.

Because of Civil War records destruction, many important records of our history are missing. The farther back she goes, the less precise are her findings. She has, however, put together a very reliable history that means a lot to me and my family and I hope will mean a lot to you and your families.

When we told one of our uncles that we were launching this initiative, we were advised by him not to do it. We assume that he thought we might find out more than we bargained for. One surprise that he might have anticipated is that our great grandfather actually fought in the Union Army. We have government records to confirm this. He, like many other North Carolinians, thought that the Confederate cause was flawed and chose to cast his lot on the side of the North. At 16, he enlisted to join two of his brothers and several cousins.

As Jane pushed back to our earliest roots in America, the documentary evidence was fragmented, but the *Family Tree DNA Project* has lead us to our early origins in Cheshire, England. Years ago, when we were in England, Ann and I visited London archives and sought to find our ancestors' names on shipping lists, but were not successful. All of this is to say that we have an important family asset in Jane's genealogy. I hope that we can find ways to make that asset better known to all of us.

Jane's findings have yielded many insights into the kind of folks we come from. Many chapters of our history have been on water. We have tended to be entrepreneurial farmers and small business people. We have tended to take our family values seriously.

One way that we may enrich our family history is to share stories that tell who we are. My story about Ethel is an example. If you will email me stories that you know that tell something about our family identity, I will collect them and distribute them. This anecdotal material could be an interesting addition to our history and perhaps could become a footnote on our Website.