Peg

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Abstract

Yeh- it’s really the berries-some people’s names, I mean. I knew a girl once name of Nacy Longnecker...
YES—IT'S REALLY the berries—some people's names, I mean. I knew a girl once name of Nancy Longnecker. Man — with a name like that I bet she said yes the first time anyone proposed to her, huh?

"But listen — I had a ganga aunts when I was a kid that was the limit. You hearda Aunt Fanny? — well, I had one o' them. I hadda Myrtle, too — anna Aunt Hattie to boot. I guess they was just about as crazy a bunch as they soun' like, too. Man — I wunner if any o' them old wimmen is still kickin' aroun'. I'd sure liketa know.

"They was all on my old man's side — the ones with the crazy names, I mean. Huh — Aunt Hattie was deaf as Charlie McCarthy. She always talked about how good things was gonna be for her an her old man, but they was so done in by th' time he finished his t'irty years with the railroad that they didn' do nothin' but watcha' trains come in after he retired — man!

"All those wimmen was hard workers, though. Man — how Aunt Myrtle could work! Raised eight kids, then she went backta work in a factory. She could talk twice t' fast as she could think, and my old man useta say if you didn' drink her coffee fas' enough, it'd eat through th' cup an saucer. He useta point to th' holes in her rug an say, 'See?'

"The tough one was old Aunt Peg, though. Man — she had two nice littl' kids, anna great sense o' humor. Trouble is, she hadda drunk fer a husband. I mean now when that guy wasn't drunk he was soused. When he hadda job, he worked pretty good on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday an
Friday. In fac’, his bosses said he worked like crazy on Fridays—like maybe he was tryna make up for Mondays or sumpin’.

“Cours, Peg hadda work too, ‘causa old man’s dough never usually got home. They lived onna south side of Lansing, and whatta crummy place it was. Peg tryda keep up with th’ dirt in th’ place, but it was rough. She did her best, though, and she never complained much. She never gave up.

‘Peg tryda get the guy off th’ bottle a hunnert times, but she couldn’ do a thing. He never dun nothin’ with his spare time accep’ drink, an he told her he was too old t’find another hobby. So he just kep’ drinkin’.

“So man—you bet we was s’prised when we went up t’see them one time. Ninety-nine and forty-four hundreds a our relatives lived in that town when I was a kid, an us kids didn’ always liketa go visit Aunt Peg’s place causa the mess ofa neighborhood anna wreck ofa husband she had—we’d rather spent our time at somma th’ other places in town—we hadda lot neater relatives than these a course.

... ‘Well anyway, this one time we went up there an almost flipped. Aunt Peg’d really outdid herself to fix up the old shack. There was a lotta new stuff aroun’ the house, and Peg anna kids never looked so happy before. Man—whatta s’prise.

“Peg’s old man wasn’t home, but she said he’d be back pretty soon. Our folks made with small-talk, ya know. I could see they was plenty shook up by what they saw, but I guess they was afraid to snoop into it right away—we didn’t get to Lansing very often, and we hadda kinda break the ice all over again every time we dropped in onna relative there.

“My brother an two little sisters and me run aroun’ the house a little with Peg’s kids while the older folks was visiting. Peg wouldn’t let her kids go out of doors though, cause they had some new clothes on. They showed us all th’ new stuff aroun’ the place, an told us about a lotta plans they had for summer... their old man promised ’em swimmin’ lessons and such. All the time I kep’ thinkin’
that their old man — his name was Vic — musta quit drinkin' . . . but he just couldn' up an quit like that, could he? Not him. And I was wonderin' where he was that night. Maybe Peg'd sent him out for some groceries and he'd come home drunk and the whole thing'd be a mess again. Man — I didn' know what to think.

“Our old man musta been wonderin' about the same things. He set there tryna make small talk, like I said, without acting like he was snoopin'. Things got pretty slow for awhile. Peg told about all her new things, an she was plenty proud. She was bouncin' up an down like a kid in her chair, like she had sumpin' she'd liketa tell us but couldn't. Her kids was the same way, gigglin' an lookin' out th' window.

“Ever since we got there us kids'd been seein' candy. There was candy onna tables and candy onna window sills. Man — we was dyin' t'get our mitts on it. Finally, my littlest sister found some. The little twirp naturally put up a fuss until she got it. And when Aunt Peg saw that, she fin'lly offered the rest of us some.

“She told us it was for Vic. ‘They told him it was the best way to keep filled up — eatin' candy I mean,’ she told us. Now my old man was no chump when it come to quick thinkin’. Right away he asked Peg who th' hell was ‘they,’ an he had Peg up th' creek then. She blushed, an hemmed, an hawed, and then she spit it out. Once she got goin', she could hardly stop talkin'.

“Vic WAS on the wagon! He'd come home extra sick one day after he'd been out tryna float himself, an he said he was goin' ta hafta quit actin' like a sponge pretty quick or the jig was up. A barmaid had said so, an barmaids usually know what they're talkin' about.

“So before Vic could even pass out after gettin' home that evenin', Peg called a friend who'd been talkin' A-A. Peg'd been hopin' t'get Vic t'look inta somethin' like that for years, but this was the first time he'd acted like he might consider. He considered, all right. That barmaid had scared him so bad he joined up with the A-A as soon as he could walk the next day.

“That'd been about a month before, an Peg said the old
man was a changed guy now. He had friends, an he had meetin's t'go to. Sometimes he got awful nervous, she said, but she knew how to handle him then. She spent all the time she could with him, talkin' with him, and plannin', an all that. An she fed him candy all th' time.

"She worked harder than ever, too. When she got home from work tired in th' evenin', she'd get to cleanin' th' house till it was perfect. But she was happier'n she'd ever been.

"Peg got so excited about the story she started cryin' a little after awhile, she was so happy. Y'really couldn' blame her, either — been married ten years to a drunk an then everythin' turns good like that.

"Vic was at a A-A meetin' that night as a matter a fact. Peg said he was a little late gettin' home, but that she'd give him some money an told him t'buy some ice cream for th' company. Us kids figured that was a plenty good deal, o' course, an we was a happy bunch all 'round after Peg dried her tears an everybody started talkin' again. Nobody said nothin' t'us kids, so we just kep' eatin' that candy, too.

"Wasn't but a few minutes later when Vic got home. One o' the kids happened t'be lookin' out th' window an hol­lered he was comin', an we all perked up t'meet th' new man. I was wonderin' if he'd remember us kids, since he usually said hi an went to bed when we come over before.

"Then we heard Vic singin' as he come up th' street.

"We all clammed up, man. I looked at Peg, an she was still half smilin', but she looked sick.

"Vic stumbled up th' steps, stopped for a second, an then busted through th' door. He knew we was gonna be there, an he thought he was actin' fine. He had onna new-lookin suit, but it was all messed up. He smiled at everybody, then weaved across th' room an put a pint o' ice cream in Peg's lap. It was all melted, an drippin' all over th' place.

"My old man about that time got up an muttered somethin' about it's bein' pretty late, an said goodbye t'Peg. Then he started herdin' us outta th' house. Peg was still sittin' in her chair, lookin' straight at Vic while he stood there wavin' back an forth. Peg was a tough old nut — but man, I thought she was really gonna break down that time."

— Bill Duffy, Sc. '58