

“A Walk In My Shoes” A Rather Eventful Life

Michael Gene Ridgway

Copyright©2020 Michael Gene Ridgway

Acknowledgments

My thanks to my wife, Karen for her years of love, devotion and support. To my daughters Debbie and Kristen for their unending love for their Dad and their dedication to providing editorial direction for both the content and punctuation within. To my brother Jeff for his memory and recollection of many of our childhood adventures and experiences. To all my family members both living and departed for their love, a great life and wonderful memories. To my loving partner Sally, who keeps me in line these days and encourages me to take good care of myself and be the best that I can be.

Book cover design and art by my grandson Brady Michael Ridgway Burgett

Believe it or not, the names are all real....lots of nicknames, not simple but very unique!

ISBN: 978-1-62249-521-4

Published by
Biblio Publishing
Columbus, Ohio
BiblioPublishing.com

Table of Contents

The Journey Begins!	1
Who's Your Daddy?	8
Life in Wooster, Ohio!	11
Growing Up Fast!	15
Oh Wait – Who's Your Mommy?	28
Fun (and Some Peril?) Along The Way!	38
Some Not So Great Lessons Learned!	45
Growing Up Faster!	50
Uh Oh – I Am Going To War!	57
I Want To Be You! – But I Got To Be Me	81
Til Death Do Us Part!	105
It Will All Be Fine In The End and If It's Not, It's Not The End – Life IS Good!	116
 APPENDIX	
Mike's Characters and Sayings	123
Every Family Has Such A List of Homes	126
Every Family Has Such A List of Vehicles	127
Memories of Karen	128

Michael Gene Ridgway

Chapter 1

The Journey Begins!

You are about to begin a journey of seventy-two years with this guy; Michael Gene Ridgway who was born on June 11, 1947 in Wooster, Ohio which is in northeastern Ohio, near Amish country. The story is about life with his extended family and the many events that make up his life and times.



Mike at a right young age

The earliest recollection that I have of being alive was between 4 and 5 years old.... And at that age everything and everybody seemed Big!

I lived with my Mom, Laurena Pearl “Bee” Davis-Ridgway and my Dad, Eugene Ellsworth “Huey” Ridgway and brother

Michael Gene Ridgway

Jeff at 369 West North Street in a duplex apartment. We lived about a block from my mother's mother; Grandma Pearl Becker- Davis' house at 227 North Walnut Street in Wooster.



Dad Huey and Mom circa late 40's

My Brother Jeffrey Darrell was born September 18, 1945 (21 months older) in Springfield, Ohio. Dad was an airplane mechanic in the Army Air Corp at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio.

I don't recall seeing my Dad Huey very much during my early years. I guess he and Mom were on the way out by then! I think he and Mom were not married that many years.

I learned years later that Dad and Mom liked to dance and were out often and Jeff and I were left with a babysitter by the name of "Boydie". Boydie was an older lady who it seemed then took real good care of us.

Growing up I had many extended family members. Mom had two sisters - we had aunts, uncles, cousins, grandmas and grandpas, great grandmas and grandpas....times two. Later when Mom remarried Dad George Horace Miller he of course had a family too. He had a brother Bill and two sisters; Nancy and Barb. We had the usual aunts, uncles, cousins, grandmas and grandpas, great grandmas and grandpas. All of the usual suspects of a blended family.



Brother Jeff also at a right young age

Mom's younger sister Aunt Glenella "Glene" and Uncle Dick Painter (yes really!), lived in Loudonville Ohio and I had two cousins; Randy who was older and Sheryl. Sheryl passed away at age 60 leaving behind a husband and 2 children.

Mom's older stepsister Aunt Marie and her husband Uncle Clyde Ebert lived in Wooster. I had an older cousin Clyde (Sonny) Jr. Sonny was a train collector and always had large train layouts. In fact, after the motel closed, Sonny connected his trains all throughout the motel rooms.

The Ebert's owned the "Peoples Motel" (neat old school name, huh) located on Lincoln Highway East in Wooster. I think it had 12 or 16 rooms and an office. We loved to visit as Uncle Clyde and Aunt Marie would almost always offer us one Eskimo Ice Cream bar, candy bar and a soft drink from the office. Their home was in front of the motel.

Michael Gene Ridgway

When we were old enough to realize, we were impressed by their car. They always drove great big Lincoln Continental cars. The back doors opened opposite normal back doors. The cars were always pink or turquoise. We thought they were rich and for those times, they likely were!



Uncle Clyde and Aunt Marie

Jeff and I would spend hours in our backyard at 369 West North St (the duplex is still there as of this writing) Wooster, Ohio playing in our sandbox – an old HUGE tractor tire filled with sand!

I remember when it was cold and snowy, Jeff and I had matching scratchy but warm, wool, plaid coats.

At age 5, I had rheumatic fever and was confined to a crib for a month or so and staying with Grandma Davis. I don't know whether we were living or just temporarily staying at Grandma "Pearl" Davis's house. I think it was at the time Mom and Dad were getting divorced or had just divorced. I was only old enough to be confused and did not understand all that was going on.



Jeff and Mike

Grandpa "Glenn" Davis owned a Confectionary Store but he was sick when we knew him. He was confined to a bed on the first floor and on oxygen. The huge green tank was chained to his bed! He made lots of noises when he breathed and generally scared the dickens out of us. I know he did not live too much longer after that visit.

Grandma Davis made the best big sugar cookies (no icing) and she stored them on the back steps leading to the upstairs as it was generally cool there. They were easy to sneak. Believe it or not, Grandma Davis also made boiled beef tongue and kept it in a glass topped box in the fridge. While it was a little scary, it tasted OK. Her other specialty was sweet coleslaw with plenty of dressing. Grandma Davis taught Sunday-School at the United Methodist Church.

Michael Gene Ridgway



Grandpa and Grandma Davis

Grandma “Viola” Richardson-Ridgway and Grandpa “Merrill Ellsworth” Ridgway – “Paw Paw” as we knew him lived at 3777 Cleveland Road in Wooster. Paw Paw and Grandma came from Spencer, West Virginia. Merrill Ellsworth “Paw Paw” was a butcher at the Acme Grocery Store in Wooster and he apparently was very good at it! When us kids would visit him he would be in the meat department with saw dust all over the floor (not likely to find that today!) His customers and fellow butchers called him “M.E.” or “Ridge”. He would feed us raw hot dogs that he had to cut the casings apart because they were in a string. No idea what was in them but they were tasty!

The upstairs of their house was rented and there were two bedrooms and a bathroom downstairs. Paw Paw owned some rental properties around town. I think most of the time Dad and Ruth Ann lived in one of Paw Paw’s properties.

There was a large commercial garage and a very small rented house located next to this garage on the family property. Behind Paw Paw and Grandma’s house there was

“A Walk In My Shoes”

a multi acre field leading down to a woods with a creek. We kids used to roam around the woods and would occasionally see someone's horse running free. The horse did tend to scare us as it would seem to charge at us.

Grandma didn't work that I know of.



Paw Paw and Grandma Ridgway

Chapter 2

Who's Your Daddy?

After the Army Air Corp Dad Huey worked at Jewell Motor Parts in Wooster.

Dad Huey later became an ace mechanic. He was able to diagnose car engine problems with a super long screwdriver. He used the long screwdriver to listen to the engine as if the screwdriver were a stethoscope.

Dad ran the Amoco Station at the corner of West Liberty and Grant streets for a number of years. Later he ran a Texaco Station down by the fairgrounds.

As a result of Mom and Dad's divorce, Jeff and I spent two weeks each summer in Wooster. Jeff and I worked at the Amoco; we would pump gas, open the hood and check oil and wash windshields. The familiar ringing bell, signified that a car had pulled over the rubber hose stretched beside the "pump island" that activated the bell. Occasionally, a driver would stop on the hose causing an annoying continuous ring until we asked them to move. In between cars you could find us drinking Nehi Grape or Orange pop and eating candy and ice cream bars.

Jeff and I worked at the pumps because of what we called the "Lube Rack Hooker" who we also referred to as "Fairgrounds Lois". More often than not, there was also a Poker Game that took place in the backroom of the station and included drinking some whiskey.

The "Lube Rack Hooker" worked like this: Lois and her male "friend" would get in the backseat of a car and it would be put up in the air on the lube rack. After business was taken care of, the car was lowered for the next friend and so on. These "games" were pretty regular and consisted mostly of the same players. Dad was never a player.

“A Walk In My Shoes”

Dad Huey apparently cheated on my Mom however with a lady named Ruth Ann Gray. We assume they met dancing somewhere as Dad loved to dance.

He and Ruth Ann married very soon after the divorce.
(1950...maybe)

My brother nor I know exactly how Mom and Dad George met, though it could have also been dancing as Mom liked to dance too.

Mom and Dad George got married in 1950 at Aunt Marie and Uncle Clyde Ebert's house at their People's Motel in Wooster. They were married in their living room.

My brother Jeff and I stayed at Aunt Glene's (one of Mom's two sisters) and Uncle Dick Painter's during the honeymoon. It was, to us, a great big house and scary with a coal bin for the furnace in the basement. There was always a hint of coal smoke in the air, even in the house and especially outside! It was very near to a city park at 315 South Water Street in Loudonville, Ohio.

Before we were in the picture, Dad George worked for a black top company and drove a steam roller.

For a short time after the wedding, Dad George worked at Wooster Rubber (Rubbermaid) – second shift, I think, as I remember Mom dropping him off.

Dad George joined the Navy not long after they were married. He went to flight school in Corpus Christi, Texas and was trained to fly “Hell Cats”, a single engine prop plane with one seat.

His Grandpa Miller walked with a cane, so we called him Grandpa With The Stick. He lived on a large farm on several acres east of Wooster. We never knew his wife as she died in a car accident years before we were around.

We would go there to hunt pheasants – well Jeff and I mostly just scared them out for Dad George, his Dad Edgar and Grandpa. At a young age, a shotgun blast was very loud and scary too. Grandpa Edgar would get upset with Jeff and I because we were scared and nervously horsing around instead of scaring out the pheasants. When a pheasant was

Michael Gene Ridgway

shot, Jeff and I retrieved it and carried them by their feet. I also recall Grandpa With The Stick had a unique talent in that he would twirl a pitchfork.

Grandpa With The Stick had a brother Curt who was mentally and physically impaired. Curt was unable to speak clearly or to walk. Curt crawled to get around the house. I always felt sorry for him and tried to communicate with Curt as best I could as a kid. Grandpa With The Stick was a chiropractor who would always “realign us boys”! Yikes that scared the hell out of us!

When we visited Grandma Davis in Wooster, I recall Dad Huey and Dad George would often have arguments (shouting matches actually) in the ally. It was scary as they would call each other names that weren’t theirs!

Unfortunately it was usually about us – Jeff and me - and Dad Huey not paying support, I think. The emotional strife and associated strains of being the children of divorced parents was to say the least, difficult. It was often also difficult not to “pick sides”. Most of the time, we just wanted them not to yell and fight and to just get along!

Unfortunately, this did not happen for much of our formidable years. There was arguing between Mom and Dad George as well as Mom and Dad Huey and Dad George. Jeff and I found ourselves in the cross-fire!

Chapter 3

LIFE IN WOOSTER OHIO

Two Weeks Each Summer and in my case for two whole years! (More on that later....)

We spent two weeks each summer with Dad Huey and our new stepmom, Ruth Ann in Wooster.

Each summer when it came time for us to spend our two weeks in Wooster I became both anxious and forlorn. Either Dad Huey and Ruth Ann or PawPaw and Grandma Ridgway, or Uncle Bob and Aunt Pee Wee would travel to pick us up.

Dad Huey's cars were generally black and as I recall they were Chryslers or Desoto's.

Paw Paw always drove BIG Packard deluxe cars.

Uncle Bob always drove white Buick Electra's and usually bought a new one every year.

Once back in Columbus, Ohio, when arrangements could not be made to pick us up, Jeff and I rode the Greyhound Bus from Columbus, Ohio to Wooster Ohio (about 85 miles and two stops). I know, you want to know how old we were....probably 10 and 12 maybe. It was safe.

Dad Huey and Ruth Ann soon had a daughter named Barbara Ann, my sister. Ruth Ann worked very hard to not create a preferred treatment of Barbara. This was helped by the fact that Jeff and I were several years older.

Later came Jim and John, my other two brothers. The house was getting full in the summers! Our trips to Wooster were always action packed!

There was always sort of a competition as Dad Huey tried to win our love by showering us with new skates, bikes, etc. I realize now of course how that must have made Dad George and Mom feel when we went back home.

One year Dad Huey had a convertible and we used to love to ride up on the back of the backseats with the wind in

Michael Gene Ridgway

our faces.....and I suppose, as I realize today, the possibility of going right off the back onto the highway! Mind you, I never said Dad Huey was the responsible father!

Sunday was a day for traditional dinner at Paw Paw (Merrill) and Grandma (Viola) Ridgway's house with as many members of the immediate and extended family that could make it.

It was usually the same cast of characters; Uncle Bob (Dad's Brother) and Aunt Francis "PeeWee" (she was a telephone operator). Pee Wee passed away many years before Uncle Bob as a result of alcoholism.

When Aunt Pee Wee died, though I had a family of my own at the time, I spent several days with Uncle Bob. They were never able to have children. Not too long later, he remarried some woman named Barbara that few of us kids and other family members liked much at all. We were never sure what Uncle Bob saw in her except that he was terribly lonely after Pee Wee passed.



Aunt Pee Wee and Uncle Bob

“A Walk In My Shoes”

Aunt Sis” (Luella Lee – “Runt” as she was nicknamed) (Dad’s Sister) and Uncle “Workie” (Bob) Wertman owned Wertman Dry Cleaners in Lodi, Ohio. They lived in Lodi with their two adopted children Connie Jo and Randy. Uncle Workie always called Jeff and me “posswally’s” (don’t know where it came from or what it meant). Randy, as a teenager, was later paralyzed from the waist down in an auto accident. He died when he was in his early forties with complications from the paralysis. Connie Jo and her family now live in Florence, Kentucky.



L to R – Randy, Connie Jo, Aunt Sis and Uncle Workie

Auntie Bert and Uncle Floyd Richardson were there on occasion too. Uncle Floyd was Grandma Ridgway’s brother and was likely an alcoholic. They would take us boys fishing often at Millers Park Lake. Years later, Uncle Floyd went to prison for what appeared to be a hush hush reason. We never did learn what he did.

The usual menu at Grandma Ridgway’s Sunday Dinner consisted of pork chops, mashed potatoes, corn, very thick pork chop gravy with lots of pepper and sweet coleslaw. You

Michael Gene Ridgway

could smell the browned pepper gravy all over the house. It was all delicious comfort food! Grandma was the master of cakes and pies! Her banana cake and her chocolate cream and lemon meringue pies were the best!

Paw Paw always had ice cream in the house – likely another source of my love for the stuff!

After dinner, Grandma would sometimes sit and play the piano. She was quite good – at least we thought so. Her favorites were boogie woogie tunes from the 30's and 40's and some gospel numbers.

On one Sunday, during one of the rare times it was quiet in the living room, came this from the closet, "Geezy Kiist Geezy Kiist". When the door was frantically opened they found my brother Jeff with the Kirby sweeper laying on him!

Chapter 4 GROWING UP FAST!

Dad Huey traded a washer and dryer for his first Harley! He rode a Harley Motorcycle most of his life until he was injured in an auto accident that restricted his left foot lifting. We kids found ourselves on the bike from time to time....sometimes three of us at a time! Oh and we don't need no stinking helmets! (See Pic of Jeff, Barb and me - the dog's name was "Peanuts" – I knew you would want to know)



When we visited for our two weeks each summer, we did have some outings with Paw Paw, Grandma and Uncle Bob and Aunt Pee Wee.

Uncle Bob, Aunt Pee Wee and Grandma and Paw Paw would take us kids to Meyers Lake Amusement Park in Canton, Ohio. Uncle Bob loved the "Comet" roller coaster – I hated it. But Uncle Bob cajoled us kids into riding it with him until we puked!

Michael Gene Ridgway

We would also sometimes drive to Pymatuning Lake in Andover, Ohio. From the pier, we would feed huge carp fish that appeared in huge masses for Wheaties or other cereal treats.

My Dad and Uncle Bob were very ornery boys. More than once Uncle Bob and my Dad tied my sister Barb in the back seat of old drivable wrecked cars, at about age 6 or 7 with a rope across her lap (no seatbelts...yet). Then they rolled them in the back field at Paw Paw and Grandma's. As it was described by them through thunderous laughter and rolled eyes, they positioned one set of tires in a rut coaxing the car up on the side and eventually over at least once. Of course, this cheap entertainment did not please Ruth Ann or Grandma. Remember? Not the responsible Dad.

Ridgway kids learned how to "handle" fireworks at a very early age! Uncle Bob loved fireworks of any kind and he transferred that love to us kids.

He used to have Cherry Bombs and M-80s that he would buy when traveling down south. His supply always included Lady Fingers (small half inch long firecrackers). The trick was to hold them in between your thumb and index finger and light it and not let go of it! Held correctly, you would not get injured, otherwise you might get a small burn. It wasn't mandatory that you hold them however!

This cheap entertainment also did not sit well with Grandma and Ruth Ann!

Uncle Bob drove a Laundry and Dry Cleaning route truck for Elliott's Laundry in the early years and then finished at Ray Crow Cleaners (Still in Wooster). Uncle Bob's truck was a panel truck that had clothes rods suspended from the ceiling and a metal floor. Uncle Bob had some of the Wooster College dormitories for laundry customers, mostly sheets and pillow cases. When he picked up from the dorms, he would use a canvas cart on wheels to move the laundry from the building to his truck and visa-versa. Jeff and I and then later Barb and Jim and John would ride along on the route. When we picked up dirty sheets from the dorm, we kids would take

“A Walk In My Shoes”

turns riding in the cart. (I don't think we would do that today!) Uncle Bob would weave so that the cart with us in it would roll all over the back of the truck. Uncle Bob's rule was you must keep your hands in the cart!

He would also pull us in the cart up the sidewalks and occasionally down a flight of steps...a little bumpy but no injuries. Winter driving was always full of figure eights and donuts in a vacant lot somewhere – yes in the laundry truck.

Sometimes we would stop by Sprucy's Dam which was a little secluded clear water pond on the west side of Wooster and we would go swimming (actually skinny dipping) – not likely legal but hey, “where there's a Ridg – there's a Way”!

Uncle Bob also drove a school bus for 33 years in Wooster. In addition to his daily bus schedule he also drove the high school teams to out of town games. Uncle Bob was one of the first driver's to install a radio in his bus for the kids to listen to. Rule was, the kids had to be quiet or the music was turned off. By the way, Uncle Bob would make the figure eights and donuts in the snow with his bus! No, not with anybody but us onboard.

I mentioned earlier that Uncle Bob and Dad were very daring and ornery. Another harrowing example was Dad driving after dark with Uncle Bob on the fender with a flashlight and no headlights. On another occasion, Dad came up behind Uncle Bob's car at night and pushed him.....not because Uncle Bob needed a push, it was for fun! – oh boy! We were adults when we were told most of these tales and it did make us wonder how they did not get hurt or worse.

Ruth Ann was our “fashion consultant” when we visited. On one occasion she bought Jeff and me “License Plate” shirts as shown below – guess we got dressed alike by both Mom's.

Michael Gene Ridgway



Me on the left (with cigar) Jeff on the right.

Living in Patuxent River Maryland

Dad George was in the Navy and stationed at Patuxent River Naval Air Station. Mom, Jeff and I took a train from Wooster Ohio to Washington, DC. Then on to Patuxent River Naval Air Station, Patuxent River, MD (near Washington, DC) to live.

We first lived in temporary housing in a very small house at St Mary's, MD

When you flushed the toilet, Jeff and I would rush out in the back yard to see the bubbles. There was a bad odor coming up from the ground! The result of a poor septic system.

Dad George often took us to a small market/grocery store (early day "convenient store"). It was there that he introduced us to jaw breakers candy. They were about the