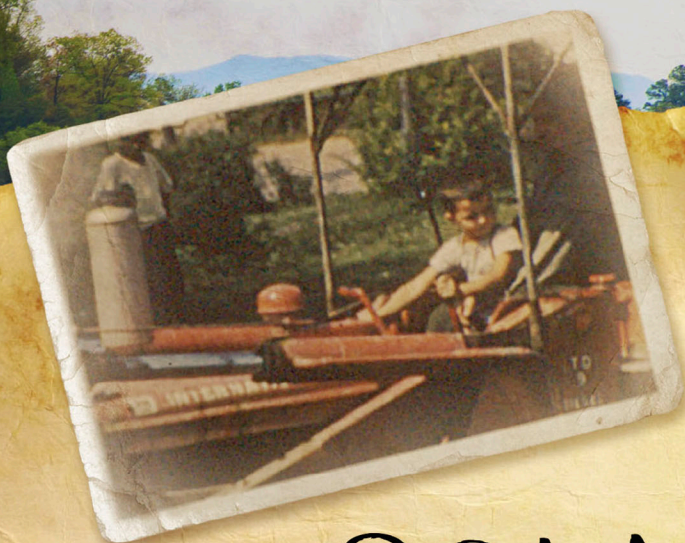


# TERRY WARDLE



## SOME KIND OF CRAZY

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**An Unforgettable Story of Profound Brokenness  
and Breathtaking Grace**

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## SOME KIND OF CRAZY

Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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# Prologue

I am a man who shouldn't be writing his story—the son of a coal miner whose hardscrabble family included a grandfather with a predilection for blowing up houses and sleeping with any woman who would half agree and a mother whose mission seemed focused on making her son into the most fearful man on the planet. Little wonder I ended up in a psychiatric hospital before the age of forty.

For my dad the family legacy was one of disdain, ridicule, abuse, and regret. For me it was a truckload of fear that followed me no matter where I went or what I accomplished.

There were amazing characters,\* like Uncle Fred, known to the family as Uncle Fat due to the rolls of flesh that flowed over his belt and settled like a small mountain above his knees. Though Uncle Fat was the jolliest of men, in my last memory of him, he was in an alleyway sleeping off another hard-drinking night. The trouble was poor old Fat never woke up.

As a young boy growing up in the Appalachian coalfields of southwestern Pennsylvania, I had no idea that there could be better ways to live. Like other families in the area, mine was poor but not dirt poor, and there was no shame in it, at least not in the economic sense. Despite its craziness, I loved my family, regardless of the ways it wounded me.

---

\* A few names have been changed to cloak the identities of those who appear in my story.

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But what does a man whose life was shaped by an often affectionate, sometimes hilarious, and always dysfunctional family have to talk about? How is it possible that the life he has lived has any bearing on other lives, on your life, for instance?

By telling my story, I hope to explore what can happen not just in one life but in every life that is touched by the hand of God. Mine is a book that zeroes in on one life—on my life—in order to place the spotlight where it belongs—on the transformative journey from broken to beloved that begins whenever people put their hands into God’s hand and allow him to take them wherever they need to go.

The story I tell begins with brokenness and pain. It’s a journey of long duration. But its trajectory, its narrative arc, leans toward joy. By sharing my journey and the things God has taught me along the way, I hope to help you on your own transformative journey so that you can experience the richness of the life God has for you.

Because of my experience counseling, teaching, and praying with thousands of people over the course of many years, I have come to understand that it is only by looking back that we can begin to move forward on the healing path.

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# One

## BROKEN

I once asked my dad if anyone had ever called us hillbillies. “If they ever dared to, I guarantee they’d never try it a second time,” he said. “After a guy in a grocery store called your grandma white trash, Grandpap beat him out the door and down the steps in two seconds flat.”

“Course it wasn’t like Grandpap was trying to stick up for her,” he chuckled. “He’d probably been cheating on her the night before. He just didn’t like some guy calling *his* woman white trash.”

My grandfather was a rough and ruddy character, a short man whose face was littered with freckles that spilled down his neck and onto his muscular arms. With ice-blue eyes set close above a large nose red from years in the sun, he smelled of diesel fuel and dirt. Despite his rough edges, Grandpap could be pleasant, charming even, until somebody triggered him. When that happened, look out!

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Life in Venetia, a hamlet in the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania, was never easy, especially for coal miners whose labor was both brutish and backbreaking. Every year the mine claimed its tithe of men. Those who survived formed a union and then walked off the job in protest, setting up picket lines that quickly turned into battle lines that soon became violent.

I'll never forget what happened to Ol' Man Barns, who lived in a three-room shack perched on the edge of a hill just above the railroad tracks. His worn-out patch of dirt couldn't produce enough food to feed his wife and kids, so when the owners of the Slopjar Mine dangled a small bonus in front of anyone who would cross the picket line, poor Ol' Barns took the bait.

Grandpap was furious when he heard the news. Like every other coal miner in our one-intersection town, he was 100 percent behind the strike. Barns was a *scab*, a *traitor*, and every infernal name Grandpap could think to call him. Clad in his favorite wifebeater T-shirt and a pair of grease-stained work pants, Grandpap paced the living room. Back and forth he stomped, running calloused hands through his reddish-brown hair, cussing a blue streak, and threatening that he was going to make Ol' Barns pay.

It must have been something to witness the white-hot curses that flew from his mouth like great bolts of lightning and the blue-tinged veins that bulged from his unwashed neck.

As Grandpap raged on about Barns's treachery, bitter winds blew through cracks in the rotted siding of my grandparents' not-so-snug home. Even the roaring fire couldn't fend off the chill that filled their shack that night.

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But there was another fire burning—the one in Grandpap’s gut. As his anger grew red hot, it forced him out of the house and into the darkness. His plan was simple enough. Head to the mine, break into the toolshed, and grab a stick of dynamite and a fuse. Thus armed, he would climb the wooded hill to Ol’ Man Barns’s house, where he would teach that scab a lesson he would never forget.

Confident no one could see him under the cover of night, Grandpap lit the fuse and then tossed the dynamite beneath the shabby porch that ran across the front of the old house.

Moments later, the porch disintegrated and a section of the house blew up. The blast was so powerful it propelled Mrs. Barns onto the top of the kitchen stove and laid her husband out cold on the living room floor.

Satisfied that it was a deed well done and in secret, Grandpap made his way back home through the night and settled beside Grandma on the couch, smugly confident that she was none the wiser about his nighttime errand.

But there were limits to Grandpap’s brilliance. Like bread crumbs left by a child to mark his way home, his footprints in the snow led the police straight to his house. The cops followed his size nines right to the front door and arrested him on the spot, ignoring his vigorous protests of innocence. Couldn’t they see he had been sitting with his wife on the couch the whole night?

Despite the evidence, Grandpap was acquitted on a technicality, which many surmise was the result of money changing hands. How Grandpap blew up Ol’ Man Barns’s house soon became part of the local lore, etching itself into our family history.

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## Grandpap and the Wardle Clan

People say that an apple always falls close to the tree. That was certainly the case when it came to Grandpap. His father, my great-grandfather, was an English outlaw by the name of Edwin Wardle, who, after serving time in prison, immigrated to America, leaving his wife and two children behind. Living with members of his mother's family, Edwin soon got his cousin Annie pregnant and then married her, despite the fact that he still had a family in England.

Together Annie and Edwin Wardle bought a farm in Venetia, in the middle of the Appalachian coalfields. Their marriage produced eight children, one of whom was Howard, or Howd, as Grandpap was called.

Howd and his brothers had two career choices—farming or coal mining. My grandpap chose the latter. All but one of his siblings stayed in Venetia, raising large families that were fiercely loyal to each other.

The Wardle clan was colorful and unpredictable with my grandpap being the most unpredictable of them all. By today's standards he would have been labeled a sex addict and a repeat offender. Back then people said he had a “way with the women” or that he was given to “sowing wild oats.”

In 1925 when he was eighteen, Howd got a sixteen-year-old girl by the name of Bessie Murdy pregnant. She was later known to me as Grandma Mose. The two quickly married and then set up housekeeping in a neighborhood known as Bedbug Row. On the first day of June in 1926, my father was born. They named him, of course, Howard.

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Both my grandparents were hot tempered and unyielding, which made for a fiery relationship. Disagreements would erupt into fights in which fists and frying pans would frequently fly. Inevitably, these arguments left soul-deep scars. After four chaotic years and one more child, they called it quits. Then my grandparents went their separate, irresponsible ways while their children were given to neighbors to raise.

Six years later Grandpap married an unsuspecting widow by the name of Matilda Yankeste Hardinger. We called her Grandma Til. But that was a loveless marriage too.

Like a child looking for someone to blame when things went wrong, Grandpap fingered my dad, saying he was the reason he had to marry two women he never loved. To young Puz, as my dad was called, the message was crystal clear—his daddy never wanted him.

Still, Howd found a use for his son. He started taking him out of school when he was only twelve years old, for two or three days a week, so he could help work Howd's wildcat coal mine. While other kids were getting an education, my father was breathing coal dust and loading a pit car by hand. Meanwhile, his father was off carousing with married women whose husbands had gone off to work.

An equal-opportunity offender, Grandpap cheated on both his wives. Grandma Til used to drive through town, going house to house trying to catch him out. To show his displeasure at her distrust, Grandpap simply muscled his motorcycle into the living room and then changed the oil on her new carpet.

One day while he was hammering to free a broken bolt on a bulldozer, the top of the punch mushroomed and a piece of metal flew off and lodged in his eye. The local doctor did his best to remove

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the splinter of metal but missed something. As the sliver moved deeper, the infection grew so severe that my grandfather had to have his left eye removed. Being fitted with a glass eye opened the door to the sick humor for which he was already famous.

Grandpap's favorite trick was to order a sandwich at a diner and then call out to the waitress, complaining that there was something wrong with his lunch. "This sandwich is looking at me," he would shout, every patron startled by his sudden outburst.

As the waitress hurried to the table, he would lift the top piece of bread and there it was—a big blue eyeball staring straight out of the ham and swiss! The waitress would shriek, and everyone at the table would laugh. Once again, my grandfather was the star of his very own three-ring circus.

Despite Grandpap's bad behavior, members of my family recall tales of Howd with genuine endearment. To relatives he was the Robin Hood of Venetia, though no one seemed to recall that he stole from both the rich and the poor, robbing his immediate family most of all.

## A Darker Side

Though Grandpap had a talent for making people laugh and women swoon, he couldn't keep his dark side hidden for long. I encountered it for the first time when I was four years old.

One night as the summer sun was setting, I watched as eerie shadows danced across the living room floor of my grandparents' home. On hands and knees near Grandma Til's feet, I was busy galloping plastic horses across the floorboards. Roy Rogers and the

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Lone Ranger had already convinced me there was but one true path for a man, and that was to be a cowboy.

Though I loved my grandparents, I felt unsettled in their house, with its musty furniture, dimly lit rooms, and the old coal furnace that belched black soot and made anyone who opened the boiler door look like the devil himself. Neither did I manage to get used to the freight train that shook the house twice daily, rumbling past less than fifty feet from the back door.

That evening, the screen door screeched open, then slapped shut with a familiar finality. I hurried to the dining room to see if Mom or Dad had come to pick me up. But it was only Grandpap. My heart sank a little as I went back to Grandma Til's feet to help my horses gallop across the hardwood prairie.

"Are you hungry, Howd?" asked Grandma. "I can warm dinner for you."

After a long silence, Grandpap said, "Terry, let's you and me go for a ride in the country."

I turned and looked at Grandma Til. Though her face registered surprise, with a gentle smile she nodded her approval.

Grandpap lifted me to my feet and led me through the front door, off the tall porch, and around to the back of the house where his 1952 Chrysler Imperial was parked. He opened the door, hiked me up on the passenger seat, and then went around to the driver's side. Nothing was said as he started the engine and backed onto the grass in the side yard.

Slowly he drove up the long gravel driveway that ran between the house and McConahay's Country Store. Then he made a quick

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right turn onto Mingo Creek Road. Still not a word was spoken. As we traveled in silence through the countryside and then turned onto a wagon path that led into the woods, an ugly feeling swept over me.

The car crept into the forest, branches scratching against the side panels as though the trees that pressed so close were trying to catch and hold us. Witches screaming threats could not have frightened me more than those sounds as we kept driving forward on that path. What happened next haunted me for decades.

Grandpap stopped the car in a small hollow far from the road so that we were invisible to cars or people walking by. By now the sun had set and the trees were casting shifting shadows, their limbs moving back and forth in the wind. My four-year-old brain went into overdrive as I imagined strangers emerging from the trees or wild animals that would eat me alive. I wanted to scream for my mother. But I couldn't. I was frozen.

"Terry, get in the back and hide on the floor." Grandpap ordered.

I turned cold as ice and began to shake. I couldn't move.

"Terry, I told you to get in the back seat and hide." Grandpap grabbed me by the arm and pushed me over the seat and into the back.

*Why do I need to hide? Are people going to hurt me? What's wrong?* These were the questions I wanted to scream at him, but I couldn't get the words out. Instead I stood on the floor in the back, transfixed as Grandpap reached for the glove box.

That's when I saw him pull out a worn leather holster cradling a revolver with a barrel the size of a cannon. I could see the anger on his face as he turned to me again and said, "I told you to get down on the floor. Do you hear me? Don't make a sound."

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As I cowered on the floor, he repeated, “Just be quiet!”

Then he got out of the car and slammed the door. The sound of the door closing behind him and my grandfather’s fading footsteps turned that four-door sedan into a jail cell. In the blackness I lay trembling, inhaling dust from the floor mats beneath me. As my mind raced uncontrollably, my throat began to constrict and I could hardly breathe. Chills swept over me that even a hot summer night could not dispel.

A small boy caught in a nightmare, I got on my knees, placing my face on the back seat. To soothe myself, I began rubbing my hands back and forth across the soft velour seat covers, tears streaming down my cheeks. “Please help me, please help me, please help me,” I whispered. But there was nobody there to hear my pleas.

The panic I felt in the car that night was sustained by the sound of trees moaning in the wind and the sensation of the car rocking ever so slightly. I had no idea whether my grandfather would ever return or whether I would even survive the night. The terror I felt in that single hour would mar my life for years to come.

Finally I heard footsteps approaching through the dark. Closing my eyes against the moment when a stranger would break into the car and grab me, I was surprised when the door jerked open and there stood Grandpap, winded and covered in sweat. Jumping into the driver’s seat, he stuffed the revolver back into the glove box and started the engine.

I felt relieved and angry at the same time. Young as I was, I knew he had wronged me. The very person who should have protected me had terrorized me instead.

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As Grandpap leaned back over the seat, backing through the woods and onto Mingo Creek Road, he said nothing. Still shaking, I climbed off the floor and onto the back seat. When we reached his house, I was relieved to see my parents' tan-and-white Mercury parked out front. Still sweating, Grandpap stopped the car and turned to me. "This will be our little secret," he said.

Unable to sleep that night, I told my parents everything that had happened. But they brushed it off, as though I had made up the whole thing. Because neither of them promised to keep me safe or helped me process the experience, which might have enabled me to understand what had happened, I relived the nightmare over and over throughout my childhood. It was years before my father finally admitted he had believed every word I'd said. He knew exactly what Grandpap had been up to that night, though he never bothered to confront him about it.

The wagon path Grandpap had turned onto that summer evening ran through the woods above Blanche and Harold Collins's house. Harold worked second shift at the strip mine and always left the house around two in the afternoon, leaving his wife alone. Whenever he was away, Blanche was only too happy to welcome Grandpap into her loving arms. Of course, the gun he had taken with him was insurance, just in case Harold came home at an inconvenient time.

No wonder Grandpap had invited me to come along. My role was to be a ruse, throwing my grandmother off track so that he could satisfy his insatiable appetite for immorality.

Because our family lived by the "no talk" rule, everybody looked the other way when I told them what had happened. As a result, the

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emotional wounding I experienced that night festered deep inside, contributing to the chronic anxiety and fear that would come to characterize my life.

Being a Wardle meant so many things. Most importantly, it meant you were supposed to suck things up and move on down the road. I learned that lesson well, eventually pushing the event as far out of my mind as possible. I didn't know that minimizing what had happened to me that night was a way of cooperating with the emotional downfall that would surely come.

## More Gunplay

After Grandpap's little escapade, I had a hard time sleeping. As long as I could hear Mom and Dad awake in the living room, I was fine. But once they turned off the lights and the house fell silent, fear would grab me by the throat and make it hard to breathe. Alone in the dark, I would turn on the lights to see if anyone had sneaked into my room, at which point Mom would yell at me to turn them off.

One night in the early hours of the morning, I couldn't stop fretting. Without turning on the lights, I began creeping down the long, dark hallway to my parents' bedroom. If I could make it to the safety of their bed, I knew that no monsters could ever find me.

Sliding both hands across the plaster wall to guide me, I inched my way across the hardwood floor, moving as silently as possible. I didn't want my parents to wake up and order me back to my room.

Suddenly the hall light switched on. A pistol was pointed at me, just inches from my face!

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Though he was upset to find he'd pulled a gun on his own son after mistaking me for a robber, my dad had no idea how traumatized I was. The scene would have been laughable, at least to some, had it not happened to a young boy who had already suffered his share of trauma. I was only five years old when that second terrifying encounter with a gun happened.

Later, I wondered why the Wardle clan was always so worried about robbers. Not one thing was ever stolen from our home, nor did a single person ever break in to harm anyone. But Dad kept a loaded gun with him in the house. Like most of our relatives, he had a gun case full of ammunition and shotguns. There was an irony in all of this because the Wardles were the ones with all the guns. If anyone was going to break the law, it would probably be one of us.

## Grandpap's Last Gift

Though Grandpap had lost his eye, the surgeon had missed at least one sliver of metal. All the while my grandfather had been busy carousing and playing jokes on waitresses, that little bit of metal had been traveling deeper into his head until it finally formed an abscess in his brain. On a wintery day in December, we all discovered it at the same time.

I was in the kitchen with Grandma Til when I heard the first bloodcurdling scream. Trembling as I backed against the box freezer, I stared as Grandma ran out of the kitchen and into the dining room.

Soon Grandpap came stumbling in with Grandma propping him up on one side and Aunt Peg on the other. They were headed to

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the bathroom. But they never got there. Moaning loudly, he fell on the linoleum floor just feet from where I was standing.

“Howd, what’s wrong?” Grandma screamed. “Get up, Howd, get up!” Fighting furiously to get him to the bathroom, she cried out his name over and over. But Grandpap just lay there.

I had no idea that my fifty-year-old grandfather had just suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and that he had gone into a coma from which he would not emerge.

Since my parents didn’t take me to his funeral, it seemed as though Grandpap had simply disappeared. But not all of him. Something still lingered. After I watched him collapse in agony, the night terrors I had been battling got worse. Whenever darkness fell and I lay alone in my bedroom, I worried that I would die in agony just like Grandpap. Night after night I would lie awake begging for dawn to come.

Surprisingly, my parents never made the connection between the traumas I had suffered in quick succession and the fear I constantly battled. Over time, Mom simply labeled me a “nervous child,” while Dad thought of me as a “sissy.”

Those childhood woundings, the first of many, fractured my heart in a way that made me afraid of my own shadow. I was ready to flee or to fight no matter how slight the threat.

My dad always said Grandpap could have been a millionaire if he had been able to keep his pants up. Well, he couldn’t, so poverty was what remained for Grandma Til. Of course, Grandpap did leave behind an inheritance of sorts, especially for my father. He left Dad a coal-truck load of insignificance bulldozed into his life for thirty

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years. He did that by communicating a steady stream of ridicule and abuse and by blaming him for the results of his own bad behavior.

Someone once asked if I felt relieved when Grandpap died. Not at all. He was my grandfather. Despite the fact that he had wounded me, like all the characters in the story of my life, I loved him. He was an impulsive, immoral man who was larger than life and notoriously charming. The truth is I miss him. I wish he had lived a long life, had taken me on great adventures, and had bought me the horse he promised and my first deer rifle. If he had lived, I might have had my own car when I turned sixteen, learned how to drive a steam shovel, and seen him waving at me in the crowd at my ball games. Had he lived, I might also have ended up more like him than I care to admit.

Only by reflecting from the distance of time have I been able to see that there was something crazy important about his story for me.

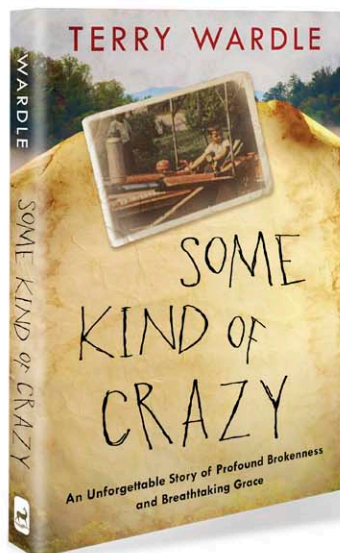
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