

# Onion Tops

Number 75

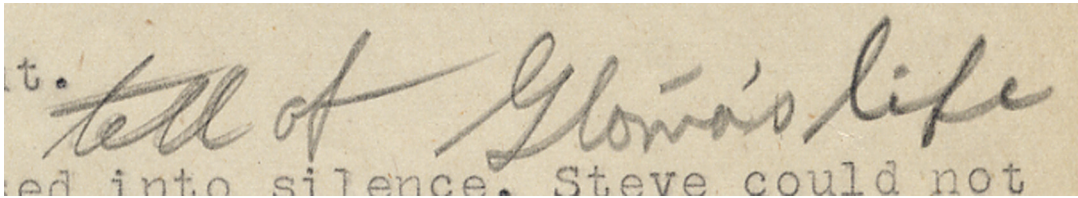
October 2018

I have been a *giant* slug lately. But, as McHaney said, “Rob’s activities aren’t lacking, they are just directed elsewhere. What’s her name?” This summer, I spent three weeks in Italy, one week in San Diego, and a month or two helping “her” renovate a new house, which I am spending half of my time in. So . . . yeah, my activities have been directed elsewhere. But, now that the new school year has started and I have some free desk-time, maybe I can get my act together again.

Maybe.

I have a few things I’ve been planning, but on one of my periodic sweeps of the internet I found some new information on an old topic, so . . .

For those of you trying to keep up, Rusty and I wrote an article for *The Dark Man* a few years ago entitled “Gloria.” Later, I updated that piece with some new information on the old Two-Gun Raconteur blog. Now, I’ll follow Robert E. Howard’s suggestion from an early draft of *Post Oaks and Sand Roughs* and



Readers of the autobiographical novel *Post Oaks and Sand Roughs* are aware that Robert E. Howard used actual people in his life as characters in the novel, only presenting them with different names. Clyde Smith became Clive Hilton; Truett Vinson is Sebastian Selby; Robert Howard is Steve Costigan; and Clyde Smith’s girlfriend, Echla Laxson, became “Gloria.” While only a minor character in the novel, Gloria provides much of the tension. First, when Clive and Sebastian conspire to embarrass Steve by having the girl come on to him; and, later, when Clive accuses her of faking a pregnancy so that he will be forced to marry her, which he does. Things deteriorate from there and the pair have to leave town: Clive to parts unknown, Gloria to Kansas City. The last we hear of her, she has divorced Clive, married “some man” in KC, and had a baby that “was said to resemble Clive.” That is the end of Gloria’s story, but not Echla Laxson’s.

Born on November 7, 1908, in Comanche County, Texas, Echla Ovie Laxson’s early years are a mystery. The 1910 Census shows a household of four: Willie Laxson, age 28, a farm laborer, married to Pinkie, who is 10 years younger than he, and their two daughters, Velma Opal, 3, and Echla, less than 2. At some point before the next Census, the family moved over to Brown County and the daughters arrived on the social scene as early as this August 16, 1919 piece from the *Brownwood Bulletin*, though their name is misspelled:

## SOCIETY: BIRTHDAY PARTY

Miss Opal Laxson celebrated her thirteenth birthday, Friday evening, with a party at her home. The evening was spent in playing various games and contests supervised by Mesdames Laxson and Walker. Ice cream and cake were served to the following: Juanita Walker, Clare Mae Bruce, Margaret Fletcher, Martha Meeks, Greata Winebrenner, Rosa Woods, Hattie Mae Wright, Minnie Keith, Echla Laxson, Edmund Seuddy, Charles Baker, Marcus Bryson and the hostess, Opal Laxson.

The 1920 Census has the Laxson family in Justice Precinct #1, Brownwood. Father Willie, now "Commodore W," works in the repair department of a railroad; Pinkie is now just seven years younger than her husband. In 1923, the city directory crew recorded some additional information: Willie was a cook at the Fred Harvey restaurant at the train depot, and Pinkie was a saleslady at the Roussel-Robertson Company. The *Brownwood Bulletin* has more information about Echla.

#### FIRST CHRISTIAN INTERMEDIATE ENDEAVOR

Jan. 18, 1922

The Intermediate Christian Endeavor of the First Christian church met on Sunday afternoon with Evelyn Hollinsworth leader. The subject was "Lessons from Paul's Life." Talks of interest were made by Morris Horn, Alice Skerritt, Willie Winfrey, Edgar Fraschiseur, Echla Laxon, Allen V. Davis, and Edna Bell Melton. Blanche Roberts favored with a reading. The meeting closed with the Mizpah benediction.

#### FIRST CHRISTIAN INTERMEDIATE ENDEAVOR

Jan. 20, 1922

The Intermediate Christian Endeavor of the First Christian Church will meet Sunday afternoon with Cecil Shaw, leader. The topic will be "How Christ Wants Us to Give." Those on the program will be Winnie Mayo, Edmond Scuddy, Louise Buckland, Echla Laxon, Margaret Crispen, Alice Skerritt.

#### INTERMEDIATE CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR PROGRAM FOR SEPTEMBER 3RD

Aug. 30, 1922

Subject: "The Harm That Comes From Pride."

"What Is Pride?"—Echla Laxon.

"How Does Pride Show Itself?"—Katherine Garrett.

"Why Do People Dislike Those Who Are Proud?"—Audrey Metz.

"The King's Pride."—Louise Buckland.

"Babel and How God Smites Pride."—Winnie Mayo.

"How Does Pride Make Us Obstinate?"—Eda Bell Melton.

Business.

Mizpah.

In September, Laxson began her freshman year at Brownwood High School, where an impressive array of important figures in Robert E. Howard's life had assembled: Truett Vinson, Clyde Smith, and Novalyne Price, to name a few. She also continued with her church group.

#### FIRST CHRISTIAN INTERMEDIATE CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR PROGRAM

Dec. 13, 1922.

"What Missionaries are doing for the islands."

Leader: Echla Laxon.

Roll call: Answer with the name of a missionary story—Bernice Scott.

What have missionaries done for the new Hebrides?—Margaret Crispen.

What are Missionaries doing for the Philippines?—Alma Buckland.

What do the islands need missionaries to do?—Elizabeth Jackson.

Missionaries and cannibals. — Aileen Marshal.

Missionaries and evil Europeans.—Lorraine Jones.

Missionaries and healing the sick.—Driscoll Smith.

Missionary talk by the pastor, Rev. C. E. Moore.

Howard and Vinson graduated in May 1923, Smith and Price became juniors in September. Both of them contributed to the school's newspaper, *The Tattler*, in which the following items mentioning Laxson appeared.

#### WHO'S WHO IN FOODS ONE DEPARTMENT

By Novalyne Price

Oct. 4, 1923

1. Mary Evans and Wilma Rohr—stove cleaners.

2. Echla Laxon and Edith Stone—they swing a wicked broom.

3. How about the laundry? See Esta Mai Howell and Tullie Hardiman.

4. Mary Frances Robertson and Lillian Redner—always ready to bring supplies and cup towels.

5. Nell Hardeman and Daisy Knox—dusters and clockwinders.

6. Josephine Franis and Bertha McAlister—they enjoy mopping the dining room floor.

7. Alef Ford—afraid to eat after cooking.

8. Vera Monsey—looks after the aprons.
  9. Marie Crawford and Juanita Elms report that it is hard work to mop the kitchen.
  10. Garbage can cleaners—Novalyne Price and Lois Henea.
  11. Elizabeth Jackson and Francis Camp—flower girls.
  12. Walneita Walker dares anyone to go near the store room and cabinet.
  13. Francis Hardin—who likes to mix foods with talk about Santa Claus.
  14. Yes, we have no indigestion—favorite song of Thelma Cartright and Virginia Davis.
- NOVALYNE PRICE, Reporter.

from THE OFFICE CAT [gossip column]  
ALL THE SCANDAL THAT'S FIT TO PRINT  
Dec. 14, 1923  
Tomorrow's news in yesterday's paper.

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Dedicated to Echla.

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Smith, these women will ruin you.

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[. . .]

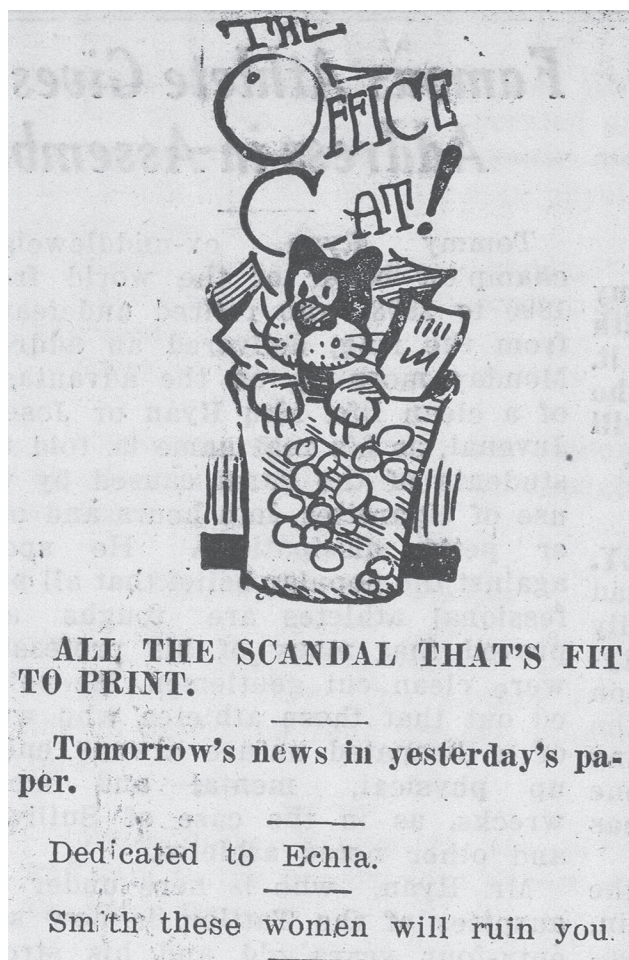
Found in the Tattler Box  
Cornelius—

Well, yes, I think Essie is cute and sorter good looking but I am afraid that you'll have to get someone else to find out if she really likes you, because she might catch the idea that I was trying to tend to someone else's business, and get mad at you, which of course I don't want her to do, because I know it would break your heart and I SURE don't want that to happen.

Say, try to find out if Homer H. still likes me. If he don't, I MIGHT BE YOURS.

ECHLA

There is no hard information available for this period that I'm aware of, but there are mentions in *Post Oaks* and *Sand Roughs*. While it is true that Howard based his characters on real people, it is impossible to say how accurately his depiction of events actually is, or even if some of the events happened at all. *Post Oaks* is presented as *fiction*.



Keeping that in mind, in *Post Oaks*, Steve Costigan says that Clive “loved her when they were both kids.” Perhaps Smith was responsible for the letter “found in the Tattler box.”

Smith and Laxson returned to BHS for the 1924-25 school year; he a senior, she a junior. In her introduction to *Report on a Writing Man*, Novalyne Price Ellis said, “The only time I really paid any attention to [Clyde] was in our senior year. He attracted my attention and the attention of everyone else because he seemed to fall deeply in love with one of our beautiful schoolmates. He was attentive and a little possessive of her.”

In *Post Oaks*, the Vinson character says of this period that Echla “liked him pretty good then, but she outgrew him like girls will outgrow boys of their own age. Got to chasing with a fast crowd of older young people, and got to be pretty fast herself. Went out on several wild parties, got drunk at a couple of dances, and altogether got herself a bad name.”

A “bad name” didn’t keep her from all social activities in Brownwood:



## RAINBOW GIRLS PUBLIC INSTALLATION

*Brownwood Bulletin*, June 2, 1924

On Friday night in the Masonic hall the order of Rainbow Girls held a public installation, when the following officers were installed: Jeanette Johnson, W. A.; Thelma Glover, W. A. A.; Katherine Garrett, Hope; Ruth Garrett, charity; Marie McDonald, faith; Echla Laxon, red; Ruby Weatherby, orange; Winnie Mayo, yellow; Clara Mitchell, green; Ruth Wilkinson, blue; Carrie Nell Fletcher, indigo; Thelma Johnson, violet; Alberta Wall, inner observer; Lattie Lee Cross, outer observer; Lola Bowden, drill leader; Charlotte Nolte, musician; Dorris Gregory, choir director. A music and literary program was rendered and enjoyed by a number of visitors after the installation.

Clyde Smith attained the top spot on *The Tattler* staff his senior year, but only one mention of Laxon appeared, in the "Bare Facts" gossip column, Dec. 1, 1924: "It is rumored that Echla and Ada Louine are going to California; for what reason we have no information." (Interestingly, Echla's father spent his last years in the Golden State.)

The 1925 Brownwood City Directory lists "Laxson, Echla Miss student" at the family home at 308 S. Greenleaf, across town and, literally, on the other side of the tracks from the Smith family home. By the spring of 1925, if *Post Oaks* can be trusted, Clyde's letters to Howard were "full of [Echla] for the past few months, and he had raved incessantly of her beauty and brains and their deep, sudden love for each other."

This appears to be the end of Echla's wild behavior, "When she tried to get back from where she'd slipped, nobody would have anything to do with her. Everybody's down on her, that calls themselves decent and respectable, and she won't run with the old crowd anymore. So Clive came back and found her pretty desperate—you knew she tried to kill herself," at least according to Sebastian Selby.

By May 5, 1925, that "love" may have escalated into a sexual relationship. Based on *Post Oaks*, it seems that Howard and Vinson discussed their younger friend's escapades from time to time. Robert Howard appears to have learned that Clyde and Echla were getting pretty intimate sometime in late May.

On June 3, Howard, using the letterhead of Paul V. Harrell, attorney-at-law, prepared a fake summons and sent it to Smith. The letter states that "on the night of May 5, 1925 A.D. said defendant [Smith] did by felonious attempt and intention commit assault with intent to commit by forcible seizure, RAPE on and upon the body and person of the plaintiff, said plaintiff being a girl of 16 years of age by name of (name withheld until trial)."

On a separate sheet of letterhead sent with the June 3 "summons," Howard added, "HAW! HAW! HAW! HAW! HAW! HAW! / Old boy I bet you could hear the penitentiary doors clank behind you. Yes, *I'm* working in a Law office now." Smith's response is unknown.

The following month, July 7, Howard has additional information: "I heard from Truett that you fellows are forbidden the company of the girl you were going with. That's a dirty shame. How come? I suppose it's because you tried to act like gentlemen. What does she think about it?"

Smith's response is, again, unknown, but according to *Post Oaks*, the Brownwood boys had devised their own prank for Howard, perhaps in response to the "summons." In the novel, Smith has arranged for Laxson to flirt with Howard in the hopes of embarrassing his girl-shy friend.

When we first see "Gloria" she is waiting "on the curb, a slim passionate brunette, seventeen, with much more firsthand knowledge of the world than was good for her. At first glance, Steve realized that Clive, though he was a few months older than the girl, was a mere infant beside her. She smiled a slow languorous smile, and cut her eyes at them, as Steve had often seen carnival women do. He found time to muse on the strange fact that modern girls of good families felt it necessary to adopt the mannerisms of whores."

After their introduction, "The girl got in the auto and they drove toward the outskirts of the town. Her slim vibrant body was snuggled between the two boys and her deep eyes, grey and mysterious, looked up at Steve. They were luring and inviting and deep beneath them lurked the hard calculation of all women's eyes when they rest upon a man—any man."

When he received a letter one day, with a special delivery stamp, on it. To his amazement it was from Gloria.

#### Chapter .9.

He read.

"Kiddo, I suppose Clive has told you - can you even imagine how I feel? Dont get the wrong idea -~~NOT~~ broken hearted but rather nauseated.

"By the way - I hope you dont mind getting letters from such "a bad little girl".

At this point "Gloria" asks "Steve" why he is afraid of women, which he responds to by kissing her. If this is what actually happened, Howard had turned the table on his friends' scheme to embarrass him. And he didn't stop there: an earlier draft of the novel says that "the petting was fast and heavy."

During the course of the encounter, Steve reflects as follows:

As for the intellect about which Clive had boasted, Steve soon decided that her lover had far, far over-rated it. When the conversation got onto such subjects as literature, art, philosophy, or science, Gloria listened without comment, a bored, far-away expression in her eyes. Steve decided that her intellectual understanding, of which Clive had raved, consisted merely in acting the part of audience—in listening to Clive's discourses without screaming or demanding to be taken home.

At the end of the drive, Gloria asks Steve to write to her, then she and Clive go out on a date. Later, the boys have a brief falling out because of the whole affair. Clive and Gloria, too, appear to have their ups and downs: "He and Gloria had quarreled often and violently; they had broken up several times but had always made up."

A draft page from *Post Oaks* reveals how Gloria feels during one of these break ups:

Then he received a letter one day, with a special delivery stamp, on it. To his amazement it was from Gloria. [. . .]

He read: "Kiddo, I suppose Clive has told you

- can you even imagine how I feel? Dont get the wrong idea - NOT broken hearted but rather nauseated.

By the way - I hope you don't mind getting letters from such "a bad little girl."

At the point where Howard quotes actual letters from his friends in the novel, he typed himself a note in an earlier draft of *Post Oaks*: "Repeat here Gloria's three letters and the one Steve wrote her."

While 1926 appears to have been a rocky year for the Smith-Laxson relationship, she appears to have maintained her social calendar.

#### FIRST CHRISTIAN SENIOR ENDEAVOR

*Brownwood Bulletin*, April 7, 1926

The Senior Christian Endeavor of the First Christian church will meet Sunday at 8:45 o'clock. Leader: Felicia Harlbut. Topic: How can we show our Christian love? Scripture: I Corin. 13:1-13; Matt. 25: 40. On the program will be Willie King, Helen Fraschiseur, Henry Perry, Mrs. C. A. Johnson, Echla Laxson and Cecil McGregor.

And

#### RAINBOWS INSTALL NEW OFFICERS

*Brownwood Bulletin*, May 19, 1926

The Order of Rainbow installed the new officers on Monday night in the Masonic Hall. The officers are Dorris Gregory, Past Worthy Advisor (Installing officer); Alice Martin, W. A.; Charlotte Nolte, W. A. A.; Myrtle Brick, Charity; Cleo Nevans, Hope; Iris





## Pi Alpha Literary Society



Echla  
Laxson

JOINT meetings were held with the D. K. S. frequently, and hikes and parties were often indulged in. The Hallowe'en party, an annual feature, was an unusual success.

The declamation, debating, and essay contests were held in April, these being annual events. A medal to the winner in each is awarded each year by Mrs. Trapp, and the contests are open to all Pi Alphas.

The officers for the first term were: President, Luciester Roberson; Vice-President, Mary Kelso; Secretary, Mary Frances Robinson; Treasurer, Bertha Guggolz (elected for the entire year). For the second term they were: President, Echla Laxson; Vice-President, Leta Armstrong; Secretary, Olivia Land.

With the unexcelled support of ex-members, such as Mrs. Trapp, Mrs. Blair, and Miss Virginia Hardy, along with the work of the girls, Pi Alpha offers the most attractions of any organization in the school, and it supports Daniel Baker to the limit.



Martin, Faith; Color Stations, Lucile Mayo, Echla Laxson, Thelma Griffin, Wilma Way; Confidential Observer, Elizabeth Browning; Chaplain, Mary Nell Morrow; Mary Helen Sims, O. B.; Mrs. Alice Martin and Cleo Nevans were elected delegates to Grand Assembly in Waco on June 16-17. The local order will also be represented by Ruth Garrett, Grand Organist.

Despite their on-and-off relationship, following her departure from Brownwood High School, Echla Laxson joined Clyde Smith at Daniel Baker College. The 1926-27 *Register of Students* has her enrolled in the Literary Department. Based on her mentions in *The Trail* yearbook, she seems to have been a fairly active freshman. She joined the glee club and was elected second term president of the Phi Alpha Literary Society; unfortunately, she would not complete the term.

Early in 1927 Laxson told Smith that she was pregnant. In *Post Oaks*, Gloria recants once or twice and the boys believe she is only trying to get Clive to marry her. The couple's attitude seems cavalier in this passage from an earlier draft of the novel, as yet unpublished:

Clive came by with Gloria and persuaded Steve to go riding with them. Steve was wary and restive in Gloria's company. Their speech was usually common place but when their eyes met there was complete understanding in their glances, which Clive missed entirely. Gloria glanced at Steve with knowledge and speculation in her eyes, and his returning gaze was understanding, tolerant but cynical.

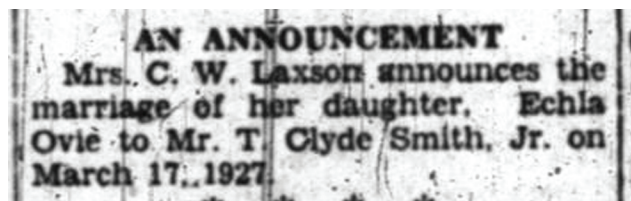
"Steve," said Gloria abruptly, "do you think I'm going to have a baby?"

"How in Hell should I know?" he answered bluntly. "You ought to know more about this than I do."

"If you have one," said Clive, "I'm going to take it away from you and raise it myself."

"No, you're not. I'm going to keep the little bastard," laughed Gloria.

Whether or not Clyde believed Echla to be pregnant, the couple was married on March 17, 1927 in Brownwood. Echla's mother ran an announcement in the March 19 edition of the *Brownwood Bulletin*.



*Post Oaks* reveals that the couple were married "and left town the same day"—Clive to parts unknown, Gloria to Kansas City. But that is not where Echla Smith was found. On May 12, 1927, she filed for divorce in *Oklahoma City*.

She next appears in an Oklahoma City directory as Echla O. Hay, the apparent wife of "Wm T," a meat cutter at the Public Market. The marriage is supported by the 1930 Census, which has Echla Ovie, listed as the wife of William T. Hay. And, they have a son, William T. Jr., who is two years old. Hmm.

I haven't found any documentary evidence for this marriage, which makes me wonder if there was an *actual* wedding, especially since the next time she appears it is as Mrs. Echla Smith in the 1934 Oklahoma City directory. She's a saleslady at Montgomery Ward's.

Thanks to her entry in the 1940 Census, I found her in a 1935 city directory, though not Oklahoma City, or Smith. No, her next appearance is as Echla Geist over in Enid Oklahoma. The 1940 Census has her married to Charles Clarence Geist and with a new son named Wayne T. Geist, age 12. Hmm again.

Shortly after the Census was taken, the Geists moved to San Angelo, Texas, and set up shop. Echla appears in the 1941 city directory as Echla E. Geist, "div head" at Sears Roebuck & Co. No profession is mentioned in the 1944 directory where she is "Eckla."

I also found Wayne in the San Angelo high school's yearbooks for 1943, 1944, and 1945, when he graduated. He enlisted in the US Army on January 10, 1946, and not as Wayne Geist but as Wayne *Smith*. Oh, and by the way, the T in Wayne T. Smith stands for "Tevis." That should clear up any doubts as to paternity.

With her only child out of the house, Echla packed up and hit the road. She appears next in a Springfield, Missouri, city directory working as a



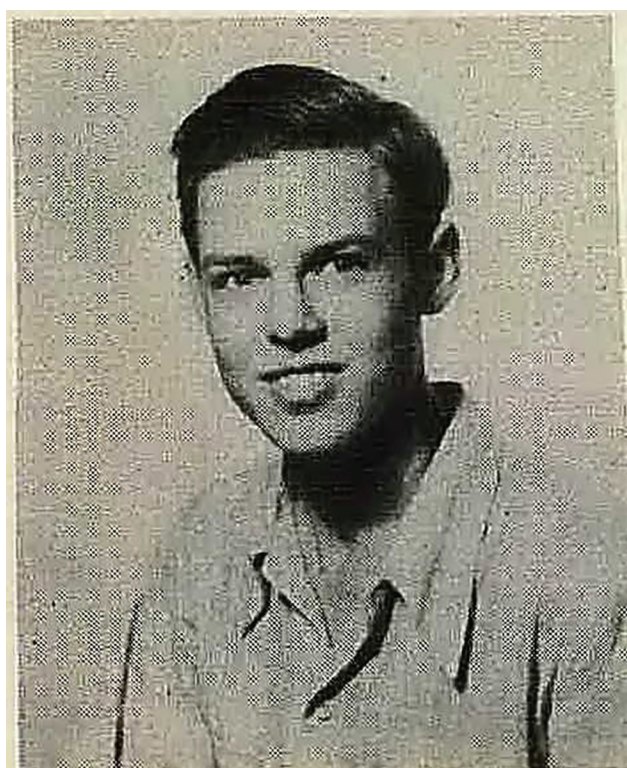
saleslady at J. C. Penny's. I've found no record of her marriage or divorce from Clarence Geist, either, but I have a marriage license for Echla E. Geist's April 14, 1946 marriage to Oliver W. Jones, who was ten years younger than she, there in Springfield. Clarence Geist, too, went about his business in San Angelo; he married Bertha Luce in 1948.

The Joneses moved to Natchez, Mississippi, before the 1950 city directory came out. She is listed as a saleswoman at Byrne's; he is a salesman for Pure Oil.

Mr. Jones went to Korea and became a lieutenant colonel. Echla fell off the map. I haven't found any other records for her until her death.

Echla died in Falls Church, Virginia, June 24, 1985 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Oliver remarried. He joined Echla in Arlington in 2005.

Wayne Tevis Smith died, apparently unmarried, on July 30, 1992. He is buried at the Quantico National Cemetery in Virginia.



**GEIST, WAYNE**  
Track '45  
A textbook wired for sound.

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA—CERTIFICATE OF DEATH									
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH—DIVISION OF VITAL RECORDS—RICHMOND									
COPY A FOR DIVISION OF VITAL RECORDS		REGISTRATION AREA NUMBER 106	CERTIFICATE NUMBER 696	STATE FILE NUMBER 85-021937					
DECEDENT 1	1. FULL NAME OF DECEASED (first) (middle) (last) Echla E. Jones			2. SEX male <input type="checkbox"/> female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3. RACE Caucasian				
	4. DATE OF DEATH (mo.) (day) (year) June 24, 1985	5. AGE 76 years	IF UNDER 1 YEAR months days	IF UNDER 1 DAY hours minutes	6. DATE OF BIRTH (mo.) (day) (year) Nov. 7, 1908		7. WAS DECEDENT EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
PLACE OF DEATH 50	8. NAME OF HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION OF DEATH (if none, so state) Manor Care Nursing Home			DOA <input type="checkbox"/> OUT PAT/ Emer. Rm. <input type="checkbox"/> Inpatient <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	9. COUNTY OF DEATH (if independent city, leave blank) Arlington				
	10. CITY OR TOWN OF DEATH inside city or town limits? yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			11. STREET ADDRESS OR RT. NO. OF PLACE OF DEATH 550 S. Carlin Spring Road					
USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED 129	12. STATE (OR FOREIGN COUNTRY) OF DECEASED'S RESIDENCE Virginia			13. COUNTY OF DECEASED'S RESIDENCE (if independent city, leave blank) Fairfax					
	14. CITY OR TOWN OF RESIDENCE inside city or town limits? yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Falls Church			15. STREET ADDRESS OR RT. NO. OF RESIDENCE 3655 Malibu Circle			ZIP CODE 22044		
PERSONAL DATA OF DECEASED 544 2	16. NAME OF FATHER OF DECEASED William Laxon			17. MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER OF DECEASED Pinkie Horton					
	18. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY USA	19. BIRTHPLACE (state or country) Texas	20. NEVER MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> DIVORCED <input type="checkbox"/> MARRIED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WIDOWED <input type="checkbox"/>	21. IF MARRIED OR WIDOWED, NAME OF SPOUSE (if divorced leave blank) Oliver W. Jones					
	23. USUAL OR LAST OCCUPATION Housewife		24. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY Own Home	25. INFORMANT—OR SOURCE OF INFORMATION Oliver W. Jones					
TO PHYSICIAN: TIFICATION	26. CAUSE OF DEATH (Enter only one cause per line for (A), (B), and (C). PART I. DEATH WAS CAUSED BY:						INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH		
	IMMEDIATE CAUSE (A) Probable bronchopneumonia						2 days		
	DUE TO (B) Rheumatic heart disease						40 years		
DUE TO (C) Cerebral thrombosis due to embolism from									
PART II. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO DEATH BUT NOT RELATED TO THE TERMINAL DISEASE CONDITION(S) GIVEN IN PART I (A)						26a. AUTOPSY? AUTHORIZED BY: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

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