

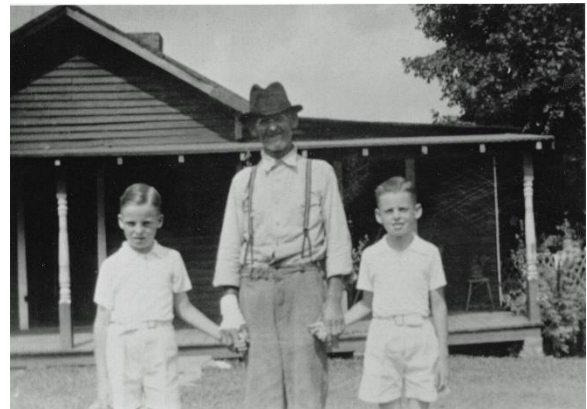
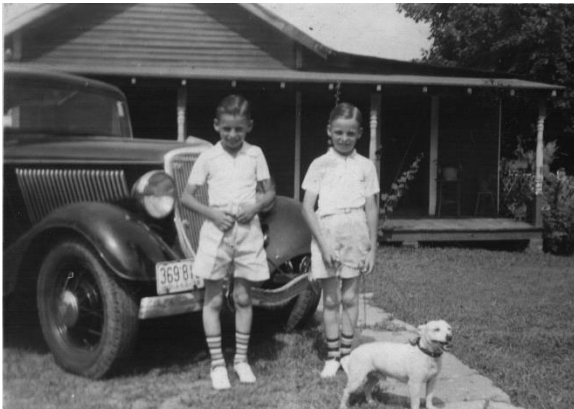
## 16. The Dennis Cousins: Jack and William George

By

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Almost exactly a year to the day after Jackie Dennis was born to Laura Elizabeth (Chenault) Dennis (Aunt Elizabeth) in 1928, his brother William George (Billy) arrived. When they were very young, people mistook them for twins.



Billy Dennis, George Dennis, and Jackie Dennis about 1937

My impression was that temperamentally, Jackie was more like Uncle Jack (a bit stern and formal), whereas Billy seemed to be more fun-loving and sociable. Whether those were traits that Aunt Elizabeth had I am not sure.

The boys did a lot of things together when they were young. The photo below shows them in a song and dance routine when they were about the same age as in the pictures above.



They played on a very good basketball team during their high school years as the column reproduced below shows. (1)

## Bremen, Muhlenberg County Champs, Have Good Record



Coach Ellis C. Risley's Bremen Golden Eagles, Muhlenberg county high school basketball champions, with a record of 19 victories in twenty-three games, are rated with the top quints in the Fourth Regional. The squad as shown above, first row, left to right: Junior Strader, Billie Lewis, O. V. Burden, Billie Dennis, Jack Dennis. Back row, Coach Riley, Carol Bruce, Bobbie Richey, Rip Gish, J. E. Rhoades, Buddy Donovan and Frankie Sparks, manager.

By NATHAN BASHAM

Bremen, Ky.—Coach Ellis C. Riley's Bremen High School Golden Eagles, winners of the 1946 Muhlenberg county championship, and the only Western Kentucky high school quint to defeat the Central City High School Golden Tide cagers this season, boasts of a record of nineteen victories in twenty-three games played. Their defeats in the four games that they dropped ranged from one to six points.

The Golden Tide gave the Eagles their first defeat early in the season, 35 to 29, but Bremen came back to even things up with the highly regarded aggregation coached by Delmas Gish, by edging Central City 42 to 41. Greenville Blackhaws downed Bremen, 35 to 30, but the Riley-men erased this defeat with a 43 to 29 win over the Hawks. The other

two losses were to Earlington, 39 to 28, whom they had previously defeated 49 to 32, and to Calhoun Bulldogs 34 to 30 in a benefit game staged at the dedication of the Sacramento High School gymnasium.

Coach Riley's aggregation has piled up 1,076 points for an average of 48.9 per game, against an average of 28 points per game, scored by their opponents. Rip Gish, the elongated center, forms the wheel around which the other speedy boys, J. E. Rhoades, Billy Dennis, Carol Bruce, Bobbie Richey, Billy Lewis, Buddy Donovan, Jackie Dennis, O. V. Burden and Junior Strader perform.

Five of the players on the squad are seniors and five juniors. The average height is 5.105, and the average weight is 157 pounds.

Here is the squad age, height, weight: Donovan, 17, 5-9, 135;

Rhoads, 17, 9-5½, 154; Gish, 16, 6-3½, 200; Richey, 17, 5-11, 150; Bruce, 16, 5-10, 150; Billy Dennis, 16, 5-9, 142; Burden, 17, 6, 155; Strader, 17, 5-7, 135; Jackie Dennis, 17, 5-9, 134.

Bremen's game record for the season: Bremen 62, Rochester 11; Bremen 76, Dunmor 16; Bremen 94, Anton 33; Bremen 40, Graham 20; Bremen 55, Sacramento 35; Bremen 29, Central City 35; Bremen 49, Earlington 32; Bremen 30, Greenville 35; Bremen 37, Utica 25; Bremen 38, Earlington 39; Bremen 30, Calhoun 34; Bremen 35, Drakesboro 28; Bremen 37, Hughes-Kirk 20; Bremen 86, Lewisburg 27; Bremen 63, Bevier-Cleaton 34; Bremen 49, Anton 23; Bremen 43, Greenville 29; Bremen 56, Lewisburg 22; Bremen 81, Dunmor 16; Bremen 38, Dunmor 24; Bremen 57, Hughes-Kirk 24; Bremen 30, Drakesboro 28.

There must have been some very good shooters on the Bremen team because scores in the 80s and 90s are really high for that period of time. The Dennis brothers were still playing basketball together on March 25, 1947 when the roster for the Bremen American Legion team included them during the Y.M.C.A. West Kentucky Independent basketball tournament.

In August 1948 Billy enlisted in the Navy, and Jack apparently joined the Air Force shortly thereafter. (He was promoted to corporal in November 1951.) I think it was while he was in the Air Force that Jack learned the trade of electrician. Seabay had large framed pictures of her nephews in uniform on the dresser in her front bedroom.

Since I didn't spend a lot of time in Central City, Kentucky after we moved to Charlestown, Indiana in 1949, my memories of Billy and Jack are very spotty. One thing I remember about Jack is that he bought L E's old black Buick when L E finally decided to sell it in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Presumably, it still had the set of four tires on it that L E bought in Charlestown many years before.

I know that Jack liked to fish. He had a trotline on Green River and took me to run the line one day. I almost had a serious accident when a hook caught on the side of the boat. I reached to loosen it just as he shouted, "Let it go!" Too late. The hook bit into the thumbnail on my right hand as it snapped off the moving boat. Fortunately, that was all the damage done.

Another accident involving fishing occurred when Jackie was one of the adults leading a group of young boys on a fishing trip. We were all being taught how to cast plugs. One enthusiastic young man made a huge sweeping motion back over his head to cast a Jitterbug and caught something big—the ear and scalp of the boy behind him. There was a lot of crying and panic, and that ended the fishing trip. Normally, when you are hooked, you simply push the barb on through the skin and cut it off, allowing the remainder of the hook to be withdrawn from the hole where it went in. This was much more complicated, however, with at least 3 of the barbs embedded in the ear and scalp. It required a visit to the doctor for professional help excising the plug from the hapless young man, stitches and a precautionary tetanus shot. This fishing trip was not nearly as successful as some that L E and I went on in future years.

Jackie was married to Joyce Kelm while he was still in the Air Force in August 1951, and it was 4 years after that when they lost their son Johnny Mike in the tragic accident described in an earlier chapter. They had two other children, Jeffery Len and Sheila Gaye.

After they were divorced, Jack married Patricia Baxter in 1969, and he had a second son and daughter, David Christopher and Ann Elizabeth. They lived for a time in the New Orleans area at Thibodeaux, Louisiana, when Jack worked on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. In later life, they moved to Scottsville, Kentucky where Jack ran a motel owned by his father-in-law. He died August 17, 2018.





Ann, Jackie, David and Pat Dennis

Billy Dennis had a colorful history in the Muhlenberg County area where he was somewhat of a wheeler-dealer and an entrepreneur. I don't think Billy was in the Navy very long. He was married to Delorice Jean Moore on June 18, 1950, but there may have been another girlfriend named Jean before her. (Somehow, the name Withrow keeps coming to mind, and there was a Margaret Jean Milam married to Gerald Vernon Withrow in Central City.) A story that was often told in the family was that when Billy brought his latest wife, also named Jean, to meet Grandad George Dennis, Grandad responded, "Aye, God, you like those Jeans, don't you, Bill?" Billy had two children with wife Jean (Alma Jean Shanks). They are Lisa Kay (Dennis) Francis (b. 1956) and Jacob Andrew Dennis (b. 1962). Bill's final marriage was around 1970 to Mynette Jane Nichols. He once told me that he did not know what true love was until he married Mynette.

Billy was heavily involved in forming a baseball team in Central City that had ties to the big-league teams. A July 9, 1954 story in the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer* notes that the Central City Reds lost their first five games, leading to a reorganization of the front office. Bill Dennis remained as president, but 25 directors were named, with Central City and Greenville having an equal number on the board and other small towns in the county also represented. The writer of the story noted that the county was a hotbed of baseball, and the Reds drew around 1,600 fans to their two home games. Later that month, the paper ran a story titled "Fans Take to Professional Baseball in Central City Despite Setbacks." The

author listed President Billy Dennis's occupation as grocer and noted that "Central City is becoming a melting pot for youngsters trying for the jackpot in professional baseball." (2) The success of the endeavor was short-lived, as evidenced by a July 6, 1955 story that a meeting of the Kitty League that day "... could well turn out to be a wake." The Madisonville Miners had folded. Central City could have replaced Madisonville except for one hang-up: "Bill Dennis, the president of the Reds last summer, is in Florida on his honeymoon and probably doesn't have baseball on his mind." (3)

Billy Dennis was involved in other businesses. He built a drug store in one corner of the Dennis Market parking lot across from the fire station in Central City. Bill was quite a salesman, and he sold jewelry in a store in Owensboro in the latter years of his life.

One other attempt that did not pan out was Billy's run for county sheriff in 1981. (4) His campaign statement noted that he had been in business in the county for the past twenty years. He said that he was motivated to enter the race due to the ever-increasing rise in drug traffic in the area. "Our children and future generations need to live in a county free from these lowlife vermin who thrive on the miseries of others. I pledge to each and every citizen of this county, I will bring this problem to an end." (4) The more things change, the more they stay the same. Billy died December 17, 2012.



Bill Dennis and Aunt Elizabeth at Seabay and L E's house

#### NOTES

1. Note the spelling of the first name "Billie" in the caption of the story. On his birth certificate, he is listed as Billie G. Dennis.
2. Mason, Billy. "Fans Take to Professional Baseball in Central City Despite Setbacks." *Owensboro Messenger*, July 18, 1954, p. 14.
3. *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer*, July 6, 1955, p. 24.
4. "Bill Dennis files for County Sheriff Post." *The Muhlenberg County Sun*, February 17, 1981, p. 1. Most recent version (2/14/2023), see: <https://hoosierpewter.com/WBS/WBS-0016.pdf>