

# *Hughie's Boy*

**Jim Tracey**



**with Jeanne S. Archer**



*Hughie's Boy*



Hughie and me

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*with Jeanne S. Archer*

Life Journeys  
a division of  
Tell Studios Inc.

*Hughie's Boy*

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*In memory of my parents,  
Hugh and Irene Tracey*






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## Foreword

*A*S I DROVE TO MY grandparents' house, my music blared and my voice rang out. I slowly turned into their drive. I stepped out of the car and saw my grandma running toward me. She hugged me tight and kissed my forehead. As I walked into the house, I looked to my left. There he was, sitting by the computer, almost unaware of my existence. I walked over to him and whispered, "Hi Jim, how are you?"

He turned to look at me and rose up to wrap me in his long, outstretched arms, then patted me with big hands that were strong and well-worked from his old farming days. "Well hello, Kara. I'm doing well, thanks," he replied.

He walked out of the room to go outside to check on the steaks he was cooking for dinner. I spoke to my grandma until dinner was ready. We finally made our way into the dining area. Jim brought the steak and placed it onto the table. Conversation struck up at once, as it always did when my grandma was around. Jim sat there and listened intently. He would add comments that were full of perspective, experience, and knowledge.

As the night continued, we arrived at an interesting conversation

little bit, partly because I've taken a little artistic license, and partly because some of the events are so remarkable that I've wondered myself if they could be true. But as someone once said, these are my stories and I can tell them how I want to.

My wish is that you enjoy reading them as much as I've enjoyed remembering and telling them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Tracey". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jim" and last name "Tracey" clearly legible.

Jim Tracey  
Castle Rock, Colorado



*My great-grandparents Mary Ann Quigley and George Tracey (seated) were the first Traceys to own our family farm in Farley, Iowa. He died in 1894, outliving her by 14 years.*



*Born in 1863, my grandfather James Tracey, was the second Tracey to own the family farm. He's pictured in front of the farmhouse with his children (from left) Laura, Mary "Mamie," Margaret, and Hugh, my father.*

## *The Tracey Place*

*B*Y THE TIME I CAME ALONG in 1934 as the oldest of four Tracey children, our 300-acre farm had been in the family for three generations. I know very little about my ancestors on my father's side of the family, which is one of the things that motivated me to do this book.

Farley, Iowa, where our farm was located, was a town with 900 people about 20 miles west of Dubuque. The population hasn't increased a lot in the past 75 years.

The small house we called home had looked quite different in its earliest days.

At one time, two totally separate sets of farm buildings occupied the land my great-grandfather George Tracey had acquired on a land grant. He originally lived in a log cabin near a dirt road. But sometime in the late 1870s, eight horses were hitched to a different house on the back part of the farm, pulling it across the farm. They pulled this "new" house across the land, replacing the original log cabin. This early house had only three rooms: a pantry, dining room, and one bedroom upstairs, which you reached through a trapdoor at the top of a ladder.

In the late 1800s, an addition was added and the structure began to more closely resemble many other Iowa farmhouses, with a porch across the front and tiny rooms inside. Four small rooms were downstairs: a living room, bedroom, dining room, and pantry, which we would call a kitchen now. In the kitchen was the sink, a stove, and two cupboards that held the dishes and food. Upstairs were four very small bedrooms.

Every room was very, very small. We thought our house was big when we were growing up, but when we were grown and returned to the farm to visit, we couldn't believe that we all survived in such a tiny house.

The dining room was the center of activity. It housed the icebox, a sewing machine, the wood stove, the table and chairs, and a couch that my dad often laid on because he needed a lot of rest. We ate and played in the dining room. It wasn't unusual to have a game of ping pong on the kitchen table. Not until many years later did we use the living room, and only after we got a television set.

Ours was what you might call a "general purpose" farm, with about 250 tillable acres. I mean, we did everything. We had cows, cattle, pigs, chickens, and a few horses. Our main crops were corn, oats, and hay.

ONE OF MY MOST VIVID MEMORIES of my parents is the sound of their voices in the early morning as they lay in bed talking in hushed tones about their plans for the day. Theirs wasn't the type of marriage many families have today where each person leaves home in the morning to go to separate jobs, and in some ways, separate lives. My mother and father shared one large, important job: the operation of the Tracey farm and family. Each of them was intimately involved with every detail. I always envied that they had so much in common and could talk endlessly, never



running out of things to say as they discussed the plans for the day or issues facing them.

Everybody says their mom is a wonderful person, but mine really was. She was the type of person who was genuinely interested in everything her family did. She certainly had her hands full raising four children and tending to all the work there was to do around the farm. John came along on my first birthday. Carol arrived two days before John's first birthday, and Margie 10 years after Carol. Our farm became the gathering place for the neighborhood children. They felt at ease in my mother's presence and welcome in our home.

When I came home from college years later, my mother and I would sit in the house and talk all day long. As my own children came along later, she was more like a sister to them than a grandmother. She became *one of them*, always wanting to know about their dates and what was going on in their lives. When someone returned from a trip, my mother was one of those rare people who couldn't wait to see all the pictures. She had a great sense of humor, and joked and laughed with all the joy and enthusiasm of a young child.

Growing up on the farm, there was a sense of decorum about her that she demonstrated by the care she took to prepare a meal and present it to her family in an attractive and appetizing way. When we sat down to a meal, the table was set with fine plates and silverware, and the food was served in special bowls. Nothing was ever served in the original container. It would have been unthinkable for my mother to put a loaf of bread on the table with the wrapper still on the bread.

Using all those dishes seems even more remarkable when you consider that there were no dishwashers in those days, and every



**Hughie and Irene as they leave for their honeymoon in 1933**



*My parents, Irene and Hughie, on their wedding day in 1933*



**My maternal grandparents, Henry Becker and  
Josephine Osterhaus Becker, on their wedding day**



*My maternal great-grandparents,  
Heinrick Becker and Wilhemina Koopman Becker*



Two of my dad's sisters, Mamie and Margaret, in 1935

In those days, people were very conscious of their nationality, and in that neighborhood it was not common practice for Germans and Irish to marry. They were very segregated. In fact, there was a small town of 1,500 people not far from us, Cascade, and they had two Catholic churches – one Irish and one German. They couldn't even get together in one church.

My mother's temper came into play one time when John and I got in a fistfight. When she caught us, she told us in no uncertain terms to go upstairs. Then she grabbed the door leading to the second floor and slammed it so hard that the cast iron latching mechanism completely shattered. When my dad came into the house, he wanted to know what had happened. No one could seem to come up with the answer.

Sometimes she got mad at my father about something. I never heard them shout at one another, but my mother did occasionally inflict "the silent treatment" on him. It was kind of funny because they sat at the table – or passed the day – without speaking to each other. We could tell something was wrong because their usual intimacy of conversation would be glaringly missing, but usually by the next day or the next meal they'd be on good terms again.





*The Story Continues...*



Blank lined paper for writing.



My mother, Irene, as a young girl

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*Around the family table or at family reunions, I've relived the stories of growing up on our farm in Farley, Iowa with my brother and sisters. Over the years, I've shared the stories with our friends, our children, and now even the grandkids. As time has passed, some of the people who heard the stories have said, "You really ought to get some of these stories down on paper because you won't live forever!"*

*As we get older and our memories fade, we recognize that there will come a time when we will wish that we had recorded them. Plus, some of the stories are actually pretty funny. Reflecting back on some of the things that happened – and how we used to do things – it's amazing to think how different our lives are now, and how drastically things change from one generation to the next.*

*Though I couldn't wait to leave the farm, there's a tie to it that keeps tugging at me. For all the hard work, hard times and illnesses, living on that Iowa farm left a lasting impact on me like nothing else ever has done. I've been molded for life by the experiences during the tough days of the 1930s and 40s. The memories will remain with me always. I had a wonderful set of parents who guided me through those farm days. I'm proud to be Hughie's boy."*

*Jim Tracey, from Hughie's Boy*



In *Hughie's Boy*, Jim Tracey, PhD recounts with humor and compassion the stories of living on a small farm in Iowa that had been in the family for four generations. Jim left in 1954 to serve in the army during the Korean War and never returned except to visit. He received numerous degrees and awards while building a distinguished career in engineering and education spanning several decades, and now lives in Castle Rock, Colorado with his wife of almost 50 years.

