

New Father

I wondered. Living most of my life as a “Gadberry”, where did this strange name come from? It was not recognizable among my friends. It is not ethnic like Gonzalez, Thibodeaux, Smith, or Yang. Why do I have the last name of Gadberry in Southeast New Mexico? It just does not fit.

I suffered all the taunts such as Gadberries, Gooseberries, and Dingleberries. I often was relieved by the short tag “Gad”. My first name did not help much either. “Donald” became Donald Duck or singing of ‘Old McDonald Had a Farm’. Or “Donnie” was thrown out as a less than masculine term. I just wanted to be called Don. Father started with me young calling me “Sonny-Bud”. It seemed to be an attempt to be endearing but often reverted to “Piss-Ant in anger.

For most of my years of relating to the name Gadberry, I became the name. I served as a teacher, campus, and central office administrator for 40 years. My name tag still lives on my resident restroom door.



Part 2 - Episodes and Memories

I studied my genealogy for several years. I traced the Gadberry (Gadbury) paternal name back to the 1300-1400's. There it stopped at an English orphanage. I traced the female side by marriage way back to the early Vikings. On the maternal side, the lineage went straight into the hillbilly hills of Tennessee. Very little was discovered there which provided any history. My maternal grandmother was insane and hospitalized in the late 1940s. I never met my maternal grandfather. I wondered if Mother was also somewhat mentally infected as well. She was an obsessive liar. Father was verbally abusive toward her.

I probably spent around \$1500 over the years on ancestry.com. The paternal side was rich with large families and lots of knowledge. In 2013, I submitted my DNA to ancestry and it came back with some cousin hits on the maternal side and origin countries (Scandinavian, Northern Europe, Germany, etc.).

Then, out of the blue, in the middle of 2020, I received a Facebook contact from a woman in Utah saying that we are very closely related as per DNA. Some of her children also contacted me through Facebook. That was a shock! I contacted Brother (Gadberry) right away. He had a genealogist friend who looked at all the DNA evidence.

The expert concluded that he was 99% sure that Brother was a half-brother and the Utah woman was a half-sister. The genealogist gave us a lineage chart (below) which showed that I am the offspring of a man called Orval Kisselburg who lived in Roswell, NM and obviously visited Mother in May. In early July 1942, Father (Gadberry) was working out of town near Lordsburg, NM laying phone lines. Evidently, Orval was laying somewhere else.

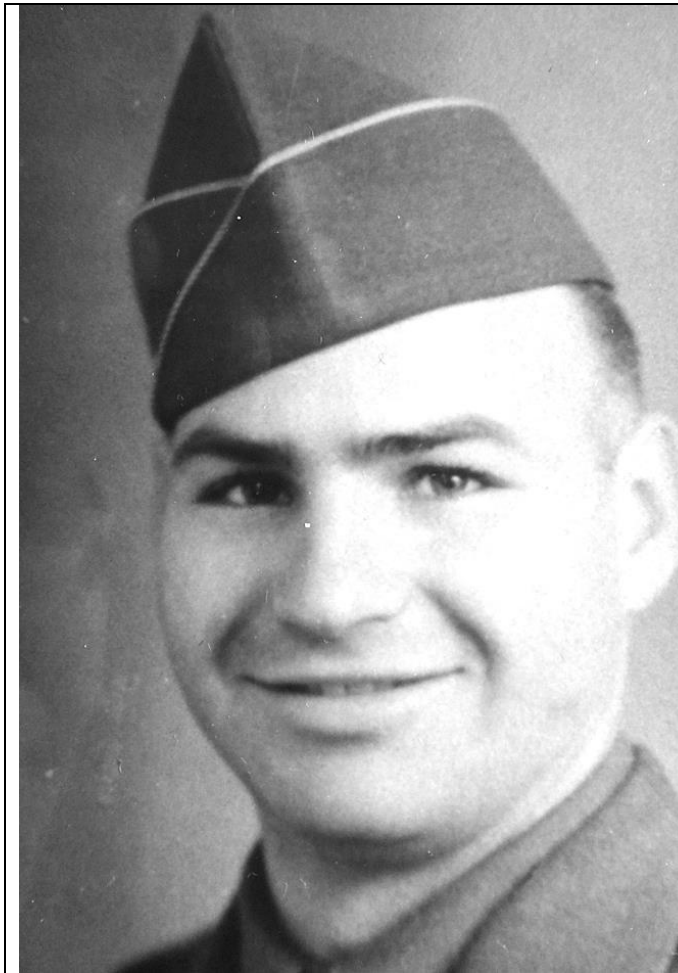
Grandmother (Mom-Mom) Gadberry made a rare trip to San Antonio to visit older sons in July 1942. Mother, evidently knowing she was pregnant, convinced Father to elope to Alamogordo, NM where there would be some secrecy. They were married in the middle of July 1942. I was born on March 3, 1943. Father and Orval both had no idea of my true origins. Only Mother knew. I think Mom-Mom was suspicious, but she liked "Kissel" too. All I knew growing up was that I did not look like my parents. Seeing images now, I do resemble Orval.

Part 2 - Episodes and Memories

It was difficult telling my two sons. They accepted my expanded family with open arms and hearts. Linda loves my new Sis. Sharon (Sis) visited San Antonio in 2021 and is a delight. We talk occasionally. I remain a Gadberry by name. I wish I could have met Orval. His parents lived in Roswell not far from me for all my years. Sharon managed to get a reprint of his autobiography/cookbook for me. I sent copies of the books to some of my “no longer” related cousins.

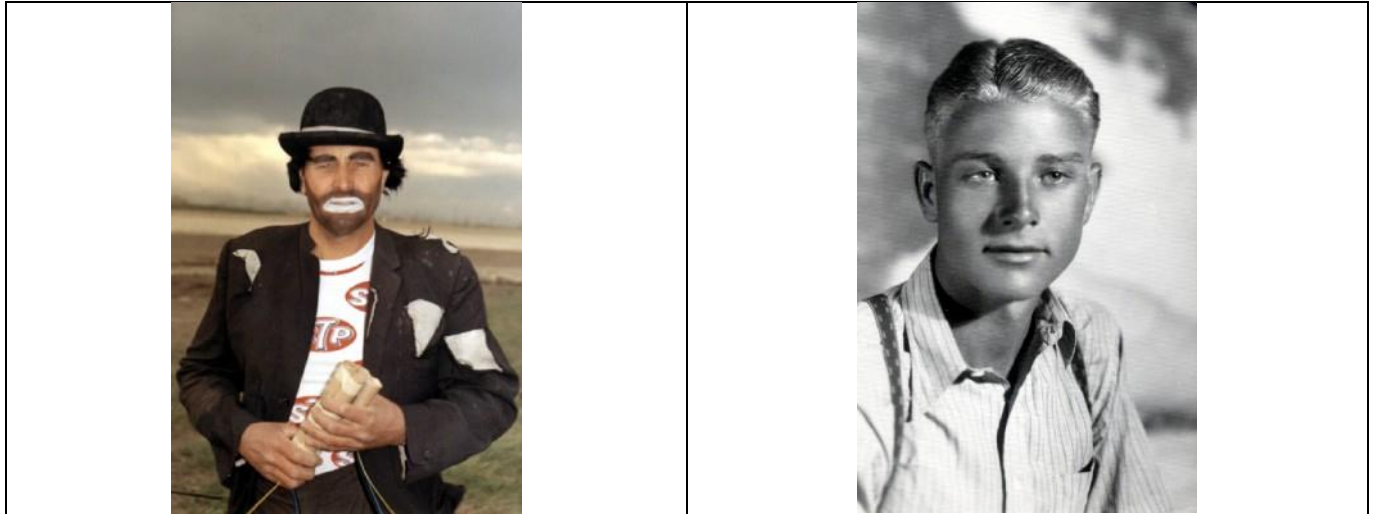
Burl Windle Gadberry enlisted in the Army on October 12, 1942, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, during World War II. He was 20 years old. That was the same day that Orval enlisted in Santa Fe. He smoked his way through two heart operations and a stroke or two.

Burl W Gadberry



Part 2 - Episodes and Memories

Orval O.Kisselberg



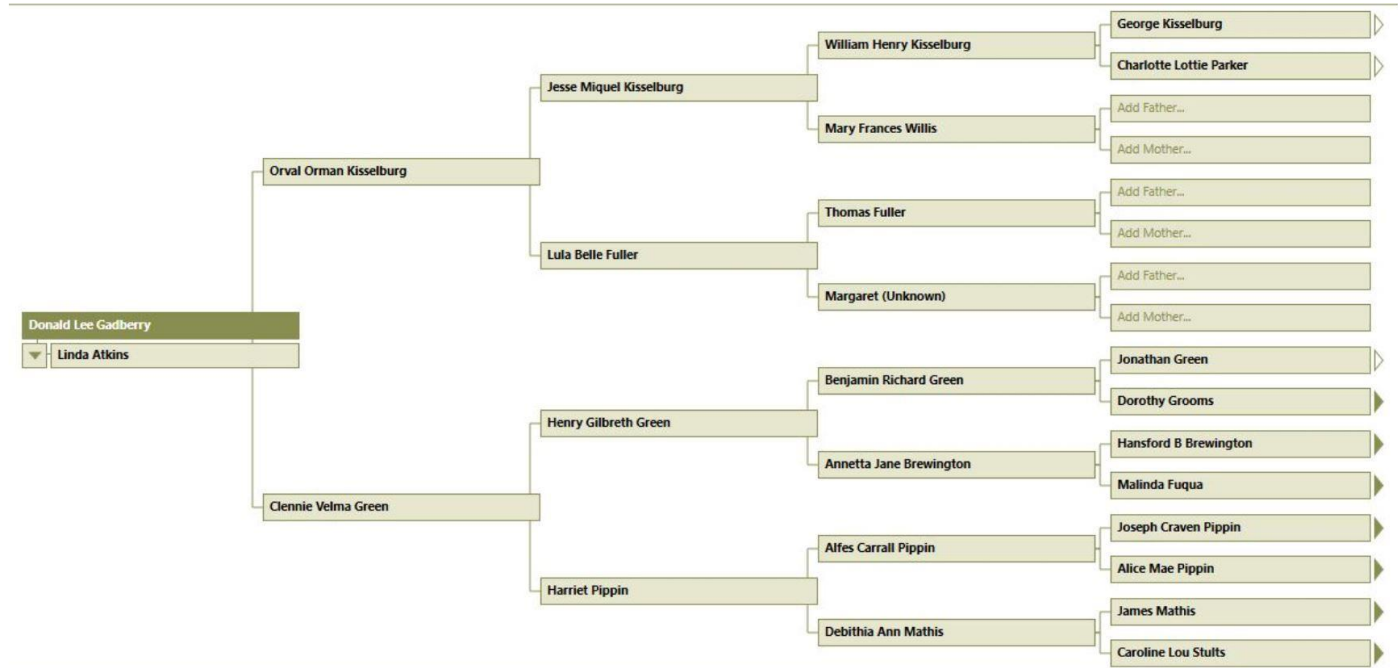
Obituary - 2008 https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/saltlaketrribune/name/orval-kisselburg-obituary?id=28736719	Stunts https://www.ksl.com/article/3008737
WikiTree Article https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Kisselburg-2	Another Obit https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/25670998/orval-o-kisselburg

Orval Kisselburg aka the Daredevil Clown

Kisselburg began his daredevil career in Roswell walking the girders and swinging on cables underneath the old Pecos River Bridge. He performed stunts on the speedway and at various county fairs from 1952 until 1982. Kisselburg's various stunts included precision driving, auto jumps (as seen below), and even stunts with explosions. Over this time, Orval befriended Evel Knievel, once even performing a stunt for the injured Knievel. In 1972, Orval rescued a young man from drowning in the Jordan River in Salt Lake City, one of his proudest moments and certainly the most heroic. He was forced to retire when he contracted Lou Gehrig's Disease in 1983. He passed away in Salt Lake City in 2008. He is shown right in 1950 at the age of 28.



Part 2 - Episodes and Memories



12-26-2013, 01:29 PM

PNWJohn
Newbie
Join Date: Dec 2013
Age: 44
Posts: 2
CERTIFIED ARM MEMBER

Re: Orval the Daredevil Clown

Hi all,

I realize this post is several years old. Nevertheless... here goes

Orval taught my dad all his stunts. My dad and I travelled with Orval and occasionally he would fill in for Orval when he was injured and unable to complete his stunts (towards the end of his career). When Orval retired, my dad bought his stunt truck and continued the legacy. I think he may have actually toured as Orval for a short time, before renaming himself "Flywheel the daredevil clown". I was extremely young during these years, but Orval has a special place in my heart as he was always very kind to me.

I may be interested in any memorabilia as a lot of it was lost over the years. Particularly Thrill Seekers which was an episode of a tv show that they filmed together in Tenino in 1973.
Hope to resurrect the thread and hear from some of you

12-26-2013, 01:34 PM

PNWJohn
Newbie
Join Date: Dec 2013
Age: 44
Posts: 2
CERTIFIED ARM MEMBER

Re: Orval the Daredevil Clown

BTW, it was 3-4 sticks of dynamite. Eventually (in the 80's i think), it became my job to prep the dynamite for the show! Yes, 4th of July was a hoot at our place 😊

Roswell N. M.

May 28 1942

I registered

Boog???

?Recond

that Company

Friday, 29th

Kessel?

Dear son I just now Rec your letter
also the money thanks a million
Burl I Readstord you a letter with
your Birth certificate in it May
20, and I havnt had any Returns
on it yet. I am sure Glad you have
Moved arent you. Burl, Boog was
sitting here eating dinner with
Weldon + me Boog had just said
Recond old Burl will come home
tomorrow night I said I sure look
for him as I havnt herd from
him just then Mrs Gaston Brought
me in this letter Boog said tell
you to come home he said he
would like to work for that Co
with you. the Girls is suppose
to Bee here tomorrow Frid 29 Wish
you could come home. Burl I dont
own any one But Kessel But I
sure do Kneed Glasses Bad I have
the head ache so much also I need
I teeth Pulled that have been
Bothering me a lot out side of that

Bill Haglund: Mason jars filled with volcanic dust

Staff Writer
Ames Tribune

Orval Kisselburg was a friend of mine.

He couldn't buy health insurance. There wasn't a single insurance company in America that would cover him, at least one he could afford. So, Orval developed a self-insurance plan. He'd sell things — posters, photos, T-shirts and other memorabilia — and all that extra cash went into a slush fund he called Orval's Health Insurance Policy. He used to laugh about it a lot.

You see, Orval traveled North America rolling cars, smashing through wooden walls of flame, flying through the air in a car and crashing into a couple more cars sitting on the ground and, yes, blowing himself up with dynamite.

Orval traveled around the United States and Canada in a truck built specially for him — the back of the truck was a ramp he used to launch himself into the air for his death-defying tricks — as “Orval the Daredevil Clown.” Countless Iowans were among those who thrilled at Orval's death-defying antics. He performed at virtually every Iowa race track during a 30-year career, including Boone, Webster City and Marshalltown, among the tracks in the Central Iowa area.

In his last years on the road, Orval performed despite the onset of Lou Gehrig's disease. Told he had only a few years to live, Orval surprised everyone by living late into his 80s before dying in April 2008 in his hometown of Sandy, Utah, just outside of Salt Lake City.

He made the most of his last years on the circuit. Although he was beginning to feel the effects of his deadly disease, he still climbed on the hood of a car, his helmet stick over the front as he was driven at high speed through a flaming wall of wood. And, he still did his most famous trick, the Russian Death Chair. That's what Orval called it, anyway. He'd hunker down in makeshift wooden carton with three sticks of dynamite surrounding him.

Then, as the crowd counted down “10, nine, eight ...” he'd hold two wires close together. When the count reached “zero” he'd touch the wires together and folks would experience the loudest of booms imaginable and parts of the cardboard would soar far and wide into the air. Amid a thick cloud of smoke, Orval would roll out of the inferno to the cheers of the crowd.

“Did you ever make a mistake doing that trick?” I asked Orval once. He looked at me solemnly and said, “Bill, you're only allowed one mistake with dynamite.”

That was Orval, a wide clown face painted on his face, his black and white clothes showing the signs of years on the road.

Thirty-five years ago, I saw Orval for the last time. His final swing through the Midwest came in 1981, and he was clearly showing the signs of the disease that had taken over his once svelte body. This time was different, though. He carried with him tiny Mason jars filled with a silver-gray dust and he was selling those bottles as his latest form of Orval's Health Insurance Policy. “Yup,” he said, “this jar is filled with honest-to-goodness ash from Mount St. Helens.”

Part 2 - Episodes and Memories

Mount St. Helens was the volcano that erupted in Washington State 35 years ago, blanketing a number of states with ash. Some of the ash was carried as far as the Midwest, but Orval just had to go out his back door in Utah to gather the volcanic ash. He filled jar after jar and had some cheap labels made.

He carried it with him everywhere he went, selling the tiny Mason jars filled with Mount St. Helens' ash for \$1 each.

I bought one of those jars. Orval gladly pocketed the \$1 I handed over. Through the years, the jar disappeared, but I think of Orval each time I think of Mount St. Helens and the havoc wreaked that day so long ago by the dust that covered virtually everything in its wide path.

I wrote a piece on Orval after his passing. His daughter called me and thanked me afterward. I'd imagine you can still find that story out there somewhere in cyberspace.

I was honored to know Orval Kisselburg, Orval the Daredevil Clown, one of a kind.

Bill Haglund is a retired writer for the Boone News-Republican and Dallas County News. He can be reached at Bhaglund13@msn.com.