

# A ROAD LESS TRAVELED

# A Road Less Traveled

A MEMOIR BY

JOSEPH J. STACK AND TU YEN-SHOU



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This memoir is privately printed for family members and is not intended for sale or public distribution. It is simply a collection of stories and recollections intended mainly for our children, our grandchildren and their children so they might have an understanding of their ancestors and the times in which they lived.

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The title: *A Road Less Traveled* was inspired  
by the following lines from  
*The Road Not Taken*, by Robert Frost, 1920.

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.”

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*Jerry on Forest Glen Ave. in Sauganash*



## BIRTH & ADOPTION

**I**T WAS 1933, THE GREAT DEPRESSION WAS wreaking havoc across America . . . . In May, A Century of Progress—the World’s Fair, opened in Chicago . . . . On July 15, Wiley Post took off from Floyd Bennett Field in New York City for a successful round-the-world solo flight in his Lockheed Vega . . . .

And, on that same day, a boy was born somewhere in Chicago to a French-American maid and a German/English-American handyman.

I was that boy.

I don’t know exactly where in Chicago, or the names of my parents. Everything about me is missing until I was “adopted” six months later.

My adoptive parents were John Anthony Stack and Elizabeth Cushing.

They were childless, and had decided to adopt a child.

How they went about doing this in 1933, I have no idea as they never talked about the adoption.

I never heard about being adopted until one of my cousins told me on a visit to their house in St. Louis. I don’t remember how old I was at the time, but I do know that it kind of hit me

like something strange and unknown had occurred, and I was the victim of whatever it was.

I don't remember how the announcement reached my parents' ears, but I only remember knowing that I was different from other children from that day on.

In the 1930s, parents didn't talk about things like adoption, sex, masturbation, anything intimate. This attitude did not change until the 1960s. You had to learn about the forbidden things from outside the home. In my case, I didn't know about sex until I went to the Jesuit's Loyola Academy in Chicago. There the priests did their best to explain these things to the boys.

When you are told that you were "adopted," you begin to think about where you came from, who were the two individuals that coupled together and produced you. Were they like you? Yes, probably. But, what are the details? The answer is: there are none for you to satisfy your curiosity. Every time you end up with a new doctor, he asks about your biological parents. Too bad, no knowledge!

It's like being on a trip and you first discover yourself sometime after the trip has started and you can't remember how you got from where you started to the place and time when you were labeled "adopted." Something is missing. And, it's a part of you that's missing.

I never learned anything about my biological parents until after Elizabeth died in 1994, some 60 years after my birth. At that time, Father had also passed away in 1981.

I felt free to explore a little about how I came into this world.

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## FATHER & MOTHER



*Mother and Father*

**J**OHAN AND ELIZABETH WERE OF IRISH STOCK. They were born in St. Louis, Missouri, Father in 1899 and Mother in 1900. Throughout my life, I always admired my Father. He had come from a very poor family; his parents were James and Mary Stack. They sailed over from Ireland in the 1880s. I might add that exact dates are unavailable as the people in my family were poor

and probably worried more about eating and paying rent than preserving information about their ancestors.

James and Mary Stack had five children: John (my father), Edward, Helen, Anna Rose, and Joe. Mary was married to another man before she married James. She had four children by the first husband: Jim, Bill, Basel, and Bud. What happened to the first husband, I have no record. In those days divorce was not available, so he either died or ran away. And, this is where the family gets very complicated. Mary's first husband was named Gray; hence, we have Jim, Bill, Basel, and Bud Gray. I only knew Jim Gray and his wife Mary who were also poor and lived in St. Louis. I remember that Jim Gray was hard of hearing as a result of service in Europe in World War I. They had three sons: Edward, James, and Jack.

As it turned out, all three of the boys excelled in life. Edward became a successful businessman in the shoe business, had eight children, and settled in Ohio. Jim became a Brother of Mary and earned his Ph.D. in mathematics at Northwestern University. Later, he taught at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. Jack became a lawyer in St. Louis. My, how fortunes do change in some families.

To get back to Mary's five Stack children. I don't remember meeting Helen or knowing about her so I presume she died before I came on the scene. Edward and his wife lived in the Louisville, Kentucky area in a house called, "Four Acres." It was a charming country place and we enjoyed visiting there. I have forgotten Uncle Ed's wife's name, but know that she had beautiful handwriting and always sent us Christmas and Easter cards with the loveliest greetings. A very classy lady indeed.

Anna Rose married a man named McDaniel (called Mack) who was a heavy-set man who owned a hog farm and I always thought he had everything. One time he promised me I could

come down to Kentucky and live upstairs over the hog barn. I was thrilled about this, and disappointed that he never lived up to his promise. Why I wanted to live with smelly, dirty hogs is beyond my comprehension now—maybe life at home had finally gotten to me!

Anyway, Anna Rose was elegant and knew how to entertain guests in that Southern fashion. On one visit, she took us to her friend's farm outside Louisville for a luncheon. They gave me a horse to ride and I remember crying when they said to dismount and come and eat. Also, on that visit I was reprimanded for running and sliding in my stocking feet across Mrs. Wilson's polished floor. Her house was a large and very beautiful old Southern farmhouse. At any rate, it was an afternoon that I would never forget.

Anna Rose and Mack had one daughter: Jean. She was a lovely young woman. I remember being at their house on one visit, and looking admiringly at Jean's arms and saying out loud, "Boy, I wish I had hair on my arms like Jean." Needless to say that did not go over very well. Later on, for some unknown reason, Jean ended her life. I have always felt sorry about that and thought that if she were alive today, I would have liked knowing her.

Next up is Uncle Joe. He never married—probably lucky for some woman. Joe lived in the Louisville area, and I recall when he was drafted into the U.S. Army for World War II. He visited our home in Wilmette, Illinois when he was stationed at Fort Sheridan just north of Chicago. Joe was a private, and later became a sergeant, and later on he was a private again. I don't think the Army took to Joe, or maybe Joe did not take to the Army. However it was, he was a fun person and always interesting.

*A Road Less Traveled*

knelt in front of the casket, blessed myself and said Hail Mary's for Tom. It kind of struck me as funny that the family was having a great old time reminiscing in the next room, and the "guest of honor" was alone in the chapel. Anyway, the Irish do have a great way of saying goodbye! 中美友



*A photo of the main building of New Trier Township High School in 1951. The school was founded in 1901, in Winnetka, Illinois. In 1950, Life magazine named New Trier one of the best high schools in America. The school was named for Trier, Germany.*

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## SCHOOL DAYS

WHEN THEY ADOPTED ME IN 1933, WE LIVED IN a small English style house on Forest Glen Avenue in a community called Sauganash. This was a mixed middle class and upper middle class suburb, and part of Chicago's north side. All the homes were different and many were built in the 1920s or 1930s. Lots of beautiful architecture, brick and stone and copper gutters, very nice landscaping, and lots of beautiful elm trees lined the streets. They always said some of the Irish politicians who worked in the Chicago Democratic machine lived in that community—the Kelly and Nash families.

After adopting me in 1933, my mother became pregnant and gave birth to my brother John Anthony Stack, Jr. on December 10, 1935 in Evanston Hospital on a snowy and blizzard-like day according to her later stories.

John was always called a “Gift from God” by my parents and he certainly was that. They had a difficult delivery—using forceps to extricate Johnny from his mother, and in so doing injured his head. That unfortunate day caused much heartache over the next 67 years for his parents and for me as his only sibling. More about that in a later chapter.

We lived on Forest Glen Avenue for a time and later moved to the south side of Peterson Avenue to a house on Kenneth Avenue. This was a kind of yellow brick bungalow that is so common in Chicago. I really don't remember how long we lived there but I knew many of the neighbors and enjoyed the experience. My best friend at the time was Eddie. The Perkaus family lived down the street and I remember that my parents were very fond of them. Mr. Perkaus later became President of First Chicago, one of the leading banks in Chicago and I will come back to a story about him later on.

On the west side of Kenneth Avenue lived the Broeckl family. They had a small English style house, and Mrs. Ann B. was my mother's bridge partner and good friend. I always admired the Broeckl family, their good-looking daughter Margie and their tall handsome son Tom. They belonged to the Chicago Athletic Club and the Belmont Harbor Yacht Club where the father and son did their sailing. Very posh indeed! They even had a varnished sailboat mast lashed to the fence in their backyard, and I thought they had the world with a fence around it!

I mentioned the Chicago Athletic Club(CAC) because my father belonged to the Illinois Athletic Club (IAC) on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. I had the impression that the CAC was more uppity than the IAC; however, I don't exactly know why. We did enjoy going to my father's office in the People's Gas Building down the street from the IAC and across Michigan Avenue from the Art Institute. In those days, only men were allowed to enter the club through the main entrance where a kind of major domo would stand to the side inside the door, and insert a pin near the member's name to indicate that he was now in the club. The women could enter through a smaller side door and would wait in the women's parlor until the gentlemen came for them and they would



*Jerry and his mother in front of their house on Forest Glen Avenue in Sauganash, 1934.*

*Mother holding John with Jerry alongside, 1936.*



*Brother John and Jerry sitting with McDaniel's dog, "Skitch" on the running board of the family car, c.1937.*

*Jerry and his father at the Forest Glen house, 1934.*



*Father with his Irish terrier, 1932.  
Apparently, had to get rid of  
the dog when children arrived.*



*Jerry on his new tricycle and  
John at Christmas, 1935.*

*Father and mother with the boys  
and a visiting girlfriend, 1935.*



*Father with Jerry  
and John, 1936.*



*Betty O'Toole,  
grandmother,  
and mother with John  
and crying Jerry, 1935.*



*Jerry and John learning to  
mow grass and sweep, 1937.*

*Jerry and brother John with their dog, Blackie,  
on Kilpatrick Ave. in Sauganash, 1943.*



*Mrs. Elizabeth  
Virginia Riddle  
and Jerry's Aunt  
Annie Rouse on  
the terrace at  
Truman Riddle's  
house in the  
Philippines, 1926.*





*Mother holding John and Jerry  
in 1936. Location unknown.*



*Father with John and Jerry at Fort  
Sheridan, north of Chicago, 1939.*

*Brother John enjoying a Thanksgiving dinner at his house on Cherokee Road in Wilmette, Illinois.*



*My brother John holding Martha at the house on Cherokee Rd. in Wilmette, Illinois.*