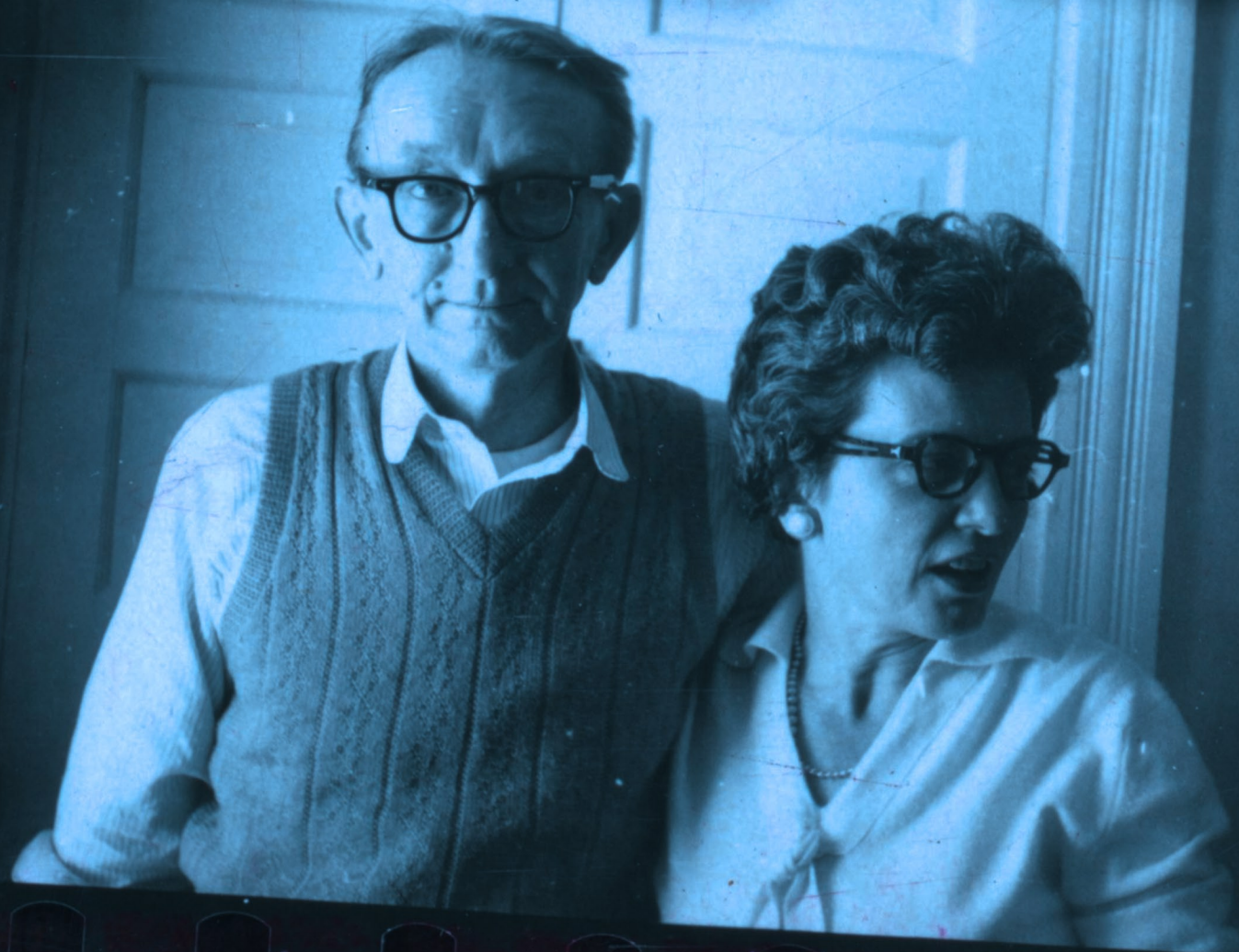


# MISTER FATHER





*Self portrait shaking hands with my father*

## DOES JACK LIVE HERE?

One day there was a knock at the front door, a cause for alarm because the house was situated on an obscure dirt street, and the cognoscente knew to come to the kitchen door.

Who could this be?

Mother cautiously opened the door to find a young middle aged man who said he was looking for Jack. "Yes, he lives here but isn't home." she replied.

The stranger seemed disappointed since he had searched all the nooks and crannies of Mckeesport to find High Street.

He said he used to work at the Duquesne Mill with Jack, and now being back for a visit, he wanted to say hello.

With discouragement in his voice, he continued,

“Tell Jack that Jim has returned briefly from Cincinnati and thank him for all he has done for me. I’ll never forget him.”

It appears that Jack had been a surrogate father for Jim.

I was jealous.





## THE 7-3 SHIFT

My father was there, but actually he wasn't there. Maybe it would be more accurate to say we shared the space the way that two cars are parked next to each other in a parking lot.

There was proximity without perks.

After my brother and I made our respective ways in the world in our fashion, we managed to arrive home for Thanksgiving, a serendipitous rarity. Tim and I drove to the mill to pick to surprise father and pick him up after his 7-3pm shift.

Waiting to hear the whistle, we sat in the car sharing dirty jokes and giddy with thoughts of our future in ShanGri La.

Suddenly a phalanx of workers fled the plant with their empty lunch pails. There he was, an old man, vaguely bent, tired, performing his daily ritual that he had begun before I was born.

Tim and Duane had become the playboys of the western world, and Jack looked past tense. What now?





## A LETTER FROM MY FATHER

As long as I can remember, my father always said to me that one day

he would write me a very special letter. But he never told me what the letter might be about. I used to try to guess what I might read in the letter; what mystery, what intimacy we would at last share, what family secret could now be revealed.

I know what I had hoped to read in the letter. I wanted him to tell me where he had hidden his affections.

But then he died, and the letter never did arrive, and I never found that place where he had hidden his love.





## HOMESTEAD

When the shadow that my dad had become turned gray, he told my mother that there was a lady in Homestead who would give a guy a trip around the world. He asked my mother if he could go to Homestead.

My mother turned and said  
“Go, go to Homestead, go around the world. Have a good time.”

If you listen very closely, you might have heard him say thank you.





## THE EXCEPTION

Jack Ambrose Mihal could not hold his liquor. One Iron City Pilsner and he was tipsy. He was an affectionate drunk, but nevertheless, plastered.

Once I wrote about this, and his sister Eleanor sent me a rude letter defending his sobriety.

“I had never seen my brother drunk ever EVER!”

Every Christmas Mother bought a bottle of Four Roses Whiskey, in case the three wisemen would visit uninvited.

The labor union's beer ordinaire was a boilermaker: a shot of whiskey washed down by a Iron City Pilsner. Every Christmas Eve Jack would empty the bottle down to one rose, go to midnight mass high, and then straight to bed, until three in the afternoon. By six he would be sober enough to go to his mother's Christmas Duck dinner.

When we arrived at 615 South street to their modest, clean house for our traditional dinner, Eleanor would inquire,

“Jack would you like a drink?”

“I never touch the stuff, but since it's the holidays, I'll make an exception.”

Eleanor had never seen her brother pie-eyed. EVER!



## DINNER AT EIGHT

My brother Tim came home to tell the family that he was getting married to Anne. That was something!

As we began to eat, Jack began to cough, almost a seizure. Something seriously was wrong. Alarmed, I asked my mother "What is this?"

She looked up from her soup and casually replied,

"Why, it's only his cigarette cough. He wouldn't die on us, I have more bills for him to pay."

Then she finished her soup.



KODAK TRI X FILM



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KODAK SAFETY FILM



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