

## A KISS IN THE DARK by Glen Haney

"This country is not in good condition", was the understatement made by President Hoover in 1929 at the outset of the great depression. By 1937 there was a hint of improvement but poverty and despair still gripped the land . Countless young boys and men left home - hit the road - riding the rails looking for work, a handout or simply something to eat. There were so many missing person reports that authorities routinely just filed them in a drawer without a second glance. Unless a raggedy stranger ran afoul of the law he was ignored and free to roam at will. This is a short story about one of those young free spirits. It is not his life story because we do not know much about him. We know only one brief chapter. Once, not too long before our story begins, he was somebody's baby boy, somebody's child.

### THE KILLING

We first know our boy as Jimmy Scott then as Donald Fiore and last as Johnny Doe "child of the road" as the newspapers like to call him. The improbable saga of the star of our story begins in Ashland, Kentucky in early April 1937 where the young man has landed after hitchhiking from somewhere down the last bend in the road. In Ashland he meets up with another young man, Hayden "Eddie" Romines, who it is said, hailed from Greenup County, Ky. Eddie and young Jimmy hit it off well despite an age difference of perhaps ten years or so; Jimmy being perhaps 15-16 years of age and Eddie being age 24.

Neither of them liked to stay in one place for long so they started east riding their thumb as far as Olive Hill when Eddie remembered that he had a relative, Andrew Stevens, that lived there. Drew lived with his wife Ollie and daughters ranging in age from ten to sixteen on the edge of town. The boys decided this might be a nice place to rest up for a spell. It didn't take long for the handsome Jimmy to draw the attention of the Stevens girls and vice versa. Eddie was especially drawn to pretty fourteen year old Stella Stevens. There was the usual eye contact, the flirting, that eventually led to a game of "Post Office" .

Post Office was a popular game played in the 1930's. Wikipedia describes it as so; *"The group playing is divided into two groups – typically a girl group and a boy group. One group goes into another room, such as a bedroom, which is called "the post office". To play, each person from the other group individually visits "the post office". Once there, they get a kiss from everyone in the room. They then return to the original room. Once everyone in the first group has taken a turn, the other group begins sending members to the first room."*

Whether it was a matter of hours or matter of days is unknown. However, at some point in time it was decided to play the Post Office game with the participants being Jimmy, Stella and her younger sister

Ruth. Whether the game also included Eddie is up in the air but he was evidently somehow involved. Exactly what happened next is the big question. About the only thing all of the participants agreed upon is that there was a shot fired, a muzzle flash, a scream, and a dead body.

When Sheriff Roy Blankenship arrived at the scene there was silence except for Stella sitting in the corner sobbing. Motioned to the bedroom he found Jimmy on the bed covered with blood and obviously dead. A few preliminary questions confirmed to him that he might be over his head so Blankenship decided that it might be best if they all took a ride over to the county seat in Grayson. Once there the questioning was taken over by County Attorney John McGill. Starting with the older Eddie, McGill began his investigation. Eddie stated that he was sitting in the kitchen, presumably minding his business, when he heard a shot in the adjoining room .He ran into the other room and Jimmy was standing stiffly erect with his hand clutching his chest. He then collapsed to the floor whereupon Eddie picked

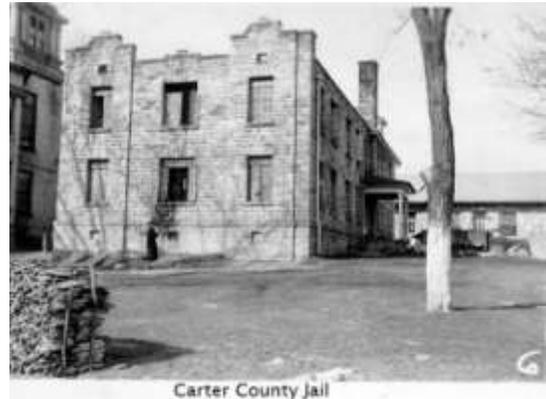


Fourteen-year-old Stella Stevens was jailed at Grayson, Ky., in connection with the murder of Jimmy Scott, shot to death while playing "post-office" at her nearby farm home. Authorities are seeking relatives of the victim, a 15-year-old hitch-hiker.

him up and placed him on the bed. All the while, according to him, Stella was screaming, "I didn't know the gun was loaded!"

Stella's story, unfolded with copious tears, didn't exactly agree with Eddie's. According to her, she, Eddie and Jimmy were together in the darkened room. Someone produced a revolver and during a scuffle the gun was discharged. She first said that all three were holding the gun when it discharged.

Later, to a coroner's jury she changed her mind and said she had shot the boy but then she recanted again and said she only had a hold of the barrel but did not fire the gun. Stella and Eddie were held in the Carter County jail pending the outcome of the coroner's jury. Unable to come to a consensus the jury released all parties with the conclusion that Jimmy Scott, or whoever he was, had been slain by a party or parties unknown.



### THE SEARCH

Now there was the task of finding out who was going to claim the remains of Jimmy Scott - or whoever he was. The story was perfect for the newspapers and the story was soon out, picked up by the wire services, and relayed throughout the country. The search for information about Jimmy was on.

Jimmy had not talked much about his background. He had told Eddie Romines that he had previously come from Morgan County, Ky.; but did that mean he was from there or was that simply his last stop? To Mrs. Stevens he had said that he was from Springfield, Ohio. Inquires were sent to these places but no one came forward who knew the lad. A family from Appleton Minnesota said he could be their boy. Did he have an appendicitis scar it was asked? No scar came the reply. Anxious mothers with missing children came to view the boy's still features. Pale and tense they would approach the casket that revealed the body to be that of a stranger.

There were lots of mourners, well curious lookers only. An estimated 2000 persons called at the Henderson Funeral home to view the frail lad lying in the casket that looked "just like a wax doll". The Olive Hill townsfolk took up a collection to buy flowers to liven up the somber scene. Days passed and hope faded that the boy would be claimed. Finally, The county had no choice but to lay the remains to rest. But, Jimmy would not rest for long in his new surroundings.

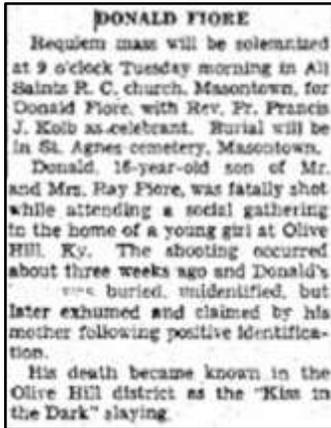
### THE MOTHER

The small town of Masontown, Pa. was not unlike the small town of Olive Hill, Ky. Tucked in the hills it served as the center of commerce for the local farm area. Phoebe Fiore had her two children Donald and Dorothy, moved there from Ashland, Ky. with her second husband Raymond, a tailor by trade. Their business occupied the front of their home on Main street.

Whether from restlessness, unhappiness or both, at age 13 Donald left home. It is not unusual for 13 year olds to do that but most soon wise up and come home. Not Donald; he stayed gone. Mrs. Fiore had done the usual, including pleading with authorizes for help but like thousands before him Donald was swallowed up by a country with so many problems to solve there was scant time to worry about another runaway boy. Still, mothers don't forget and Mrs. was constantly on the lookout.

It was several days before the news reached her about the events that had taken place in Olive Hill. The description of the dead boy tallied in every way with her missing boy...could it be? The only way she would know for sure would be to view the remains so she contacted County Coroner Henderson in Kentucky. Although reluctant to go through the process he agreed to exhume the body so the Fiore family could satisfy themselves.

Scars on the dead boy's head and ankle were central in her identification. Yes said Phoebe, there was no doubt, that was Donald. Sure, he had changed some in a year's time but there was no doubt in her mind- it was him . [That the dead boy had come to Olive Hill from Ashland, Ky. was likely another factor that helped Mrs. Fiore arrive at her identification. Her Donald had previously in Ashland and may had returned there when he left home.] The husband, Mr. Fiore, however, was not convinced. Donald was only his step-son and he didn't know anything about scars but he was skeptical. Donald's sister, Dorothy was sent for to be the tie breaker. Yes, she confirmed, that was indeed Donald. With that confirmation the body was taken back to Masontown where church services were held and the boy was once again laid to rest, this time in St. Agnes cemetery. The grieving mother faithfully placed fresh flowers on the grave and after the settlement of a small insurance policy a stone cross had been ordered to place on the grave. Seemingly, the mystery of the "child of the road" had finally be resolved.



### THE SENATOR

To this day, Dr. J.W. Whitten's name is held in high esteem in his home town of Tazewell and indeed, throughout the state of Virginia. He is mostly remembered as the kindly benefactor of many homeless boys that he took in for many ears. Some were homeless or needing medical attention or simply the advantage of a good home. As early as the 1920's he was sheltering needy boys and when he died in 1959 nearly 200 boys could claim that they were indebted to Dr. Whitten. As many as 20 boys at a time would be housed, fed and clothed in his brick mansion in the center of Tazewell. They attended school, participated in school sports and activities and were otherwise accepted by the town. We do not know how this was all arranged as he had a busy medical practice and a Senator to boot. Presumably, the Doctor keep a staff on hand to keep things running.

According to Dr. Whitten he was returning from a call on a blustery day in March 1936 and stopped at a filling station to get gas. A thin, shivering boy was also stopped there evidently between rides. The Doctor greeted the boy and a conversation started. He had not eaten in four days the boy said. He said his mother and father were dead and that he had been hitch-hiking for months. Taking pity, Dr. Whitten to the youth home where he was welcomed by a half dozen other boys with similar stories.

The boy said his name was Donald Watson. The Doctor took a special liking to Donald. This boy was different..a little brighter than the other boys and not as withdrawn. Soon, Donald was helping the Doctor on his rounds and even to Richmond where he served as a page boy in the house senate. For two years the boy lived in the Doctors home. He was popular in school and made good grades. He filled out and grew to nearly six feet tall. The doctor treated him as he would his very own. Plans were made for a possible West Point Military education or, following in the footsteps of the doctor, a physician. Plans went out the window however, when, on April 26, 1936, Donald just disappeared. All of his belongings were left behind including sixty- five dollars in the bank. Frantic, Dr. Whitten broadcast appeals for the return of his "lost boy". He even asked the FBI for assistance in the search. He drove about the countryside seeking some trace of the boy. It was no use - Donald Watson had vanished.

### THE REUNION

It was the day before Mother's Day, Saturday May 7, 1938. Rev. Father Francis Kolb pastor of All Saints Church answered the knock on his door see a tall, familiar looking young man quietly standing there with a smile. In a flash of recognition the father could barely say the words, "My God, I buried you a year ago, didn't I" ? But, there he



was Donald Fiore, alive and very well. They quickly updated each other. Donald was completely unaware of the events in Olive Hill and his presumed death. He had been traveling about he said, finally tiring, he wanted to surprise his mother for Mother's Day. He had stopped by to ask Father Keith to accompany him home just in case his mother wanted to scold him for his long absence. Father Kolb agreed to walk Donald the short distance to the house of his parents. They arrived at the front door of the Tailor Shop in the front of the house and Donald walked in. "Hello Pop", he said to his step-father who was bent over a sewing machine. Stunned, Raymond Fiore, could only think to say, "Hello son." Raymond was stunned but not shocked. After all, he was never positive that it was Donald who lay in the St. Agnes cemetery. Passing through the shop Donald throw open another and greeted his mother seated at the kitchen table, "Hello Mom", he said. Speechless, Mrs. Fiore turned pale, attempted to rise, and straightaway fainted. Recovering, she sobbed and shook as she hugged and kissed her boy. Word that Donald had returned from the grave quickly spread throughout Masontown and Saturday night traffic was blocked in the vicinity of the tailor shop as friends attempted to have a word with him. In the days to follow his appearance created a furor wherever he went. People would stop and stare and



point him out. Children dogged his footsteps when he went out. Everyone wanted to be around or at least get a glimpse of the "ghost boy".

In a short interview Mrs. Fiore remarked that she was "so happy I can't think". A few minutes of conversation is punctuated with alternate tears and laughter. Now the entire nation wanted to hear firsthand about the "resurrection". The entire family was famous, even appearing on the popular movie newsreel **March of Time**. New York telephoned- There was an offer to appear on the radio broadcast **Believe It Or Not**. The ordeal was overwhelming to Mrs. Fiore and she suffered a breakdown and was

**"Ghost Boy" Invited to Radio His "Resurrection"**

The Mother of the Return to Earth of Donnie  
 HAS ACCEPTED OFFER

**"RESURRECTION" OF MASONTOWN L.A.D. IS SEEN IN FILMS**

Return of Donald Fiore Appears in March of Time.

**HAS NOT RETURNED**

"Resurrection" of Donald Fiore "Ghost" was seen a year before he returned to "Mass" as his mother's son will see around the clock.

confined to bed. There she offered a silent prayer for the unknown lad whom she had more than a year believed to be her son.

**THE SENATOR PART 2**

Back in Tazewell the front page news soon grabbed the attention of Dr. Whitten. Amazingly, there on the front page was his ward of the last two years - Donald Watson. He was relieved but puzzled and at once wrote to the Masontown chief of police pleading for news about the youth and "my little boy's family." Donald agreed to talk to the Doctor and made the telephone call. He was truly sorry, he said. He loved the doctor like a father, he said, and was so grateful for all that had been done for him. That is why he skipped out without saying anything - he just couldn't bear to hurt him. Donald went on to say, that he had this overwhelming urge to go back home-to see his mother and his family. That is why he left.

But the Doctor was not easily dissuaded and wrote the following letter to Donald's mother:

*"Please don't blame me for the prolonged absence of Don. Had he told me about you I would have written you or sent him to you for, after the anxiety I have gone through about him, "I can understand yours has been greater and God know I sympathize with you. "Don' has been with me for two years-and your love for him cannot surpass mine. Get him to sit down and 'tell you about me and what I 'have tried to do for him. How he has gone to school; how he was a page In the Senate of Virginia and I have taken him on trips and about —I wrote the above while I was attending a mother awaiting a baby— will-continue on regular stationery." After the doctor had returned home he resumed his letter: "At times I had to punish him and God knows It hurt me worse than it did him. It hurt my soul and him only physically. I learned to love Don more than any other boy at my home, because I thought I was the only one he had to depend on. Then he was more thoughtful of me than the others always doing little things for me the others wouldn't think of. That is why I am trying to work with tears In my eyes and interest In my work and surroundings so dimmed that apparently there is no further light. If Don knew how my heart was broken he would say a prayer for me.*

*"Please take care of Don. Don't let him go with bad boys or girls. I have begged him not to smoke cigarettes. Don is a gentleman and I had planned so much for him and it I can assist you to carry out these plans won't you please allow me the privilege. The other ' boys 'cried themselves to sleep after Don left. Where you had a funeral In your home we had one too. I am enclosing a news article about Don as I clipped it from a newspaper. Show it to Don. Very sincerely, JACK W WITTEN"*

Donald did go visit the doctor a few weeks later. Accompanied by his sister they were picked up by Dr. Witten's chuffer driven limo and stayed for a few days. By now famous, it was a grand reunion with friends, schoolmates and the other boy's at the home. The Doctor, however, failed persuade Donald to move back and after a short stay Donald moved back home to stay. If there was further contact between them it is not recorded.

#### EPILOGUE

In short order the entire affair was yesterdays news and soon forgotten. Even the final bizarre twist to this story made only a brief column in the local newspaper. Right after Pearl Harbor Ronald enlisted into the Navy. He stayed in there for ten years until he became ill in 1951 and was sent to Aspinwall Hospital - the same hospital that his step-father had stayed just 5 years before. In there on February 11, 1951 Donald's luck finally run out. He died there from Pneumonia. He was only 28 years old. Reprinted here on the right side of this page final irony of his burial:

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Dr. Witten remained a Virginia state senator until 1957. He held that post for more than 25 years. He died in October 1959.

Phoebe Faiore's husband Raymond, a WW1 veteran, went to Aspenwall Veteran Hospital in 1946. Something came over him while there because once he was released he did not want to go back home and so he deserted Mrs. Fiore. She was forced to sell all their possessions to survive. Raymond reappeared some 5 years later only to be imprisoned for bribing a city councilman in a strip mining scheme that went wrong.

Donald's sister Dorothy moved with her husband to California and died there in 2001.

Hayden (Eddie) Romines vanished from history, at least as far as I can determine.

The Stevens family blissfully faded from the spotlight and likely wishes to remain so.

***This story has been constructed entirely from newspaper accounts from The Portsmouth Ohio Times, The Uniontown Pa. Daily News Standard and The Connellsville, Pa. Daily Courier***

#### Masontown Vet Buried In St. Agnes Cemetery

Donald C. Fiore, Masontown, who died last week in the Veterans hospital, Aspinwall, was buried in St. Agnes cemetery, Leckrone, beside the body of an unknown person, who had been buried about 14 years ago by his family when it was mistaken for him.

While a youth he had gone to work and shortly afterward his family received a report that he had died. The parents went down and identified the body and brought it back for funeral services and burial. However, a few months later their son walked into the house.

The first body was never removed and when Fiore died last week from pneumonia, the family decided it was only fitting that he be buried beside the body of the person who was mistaken for him years before.