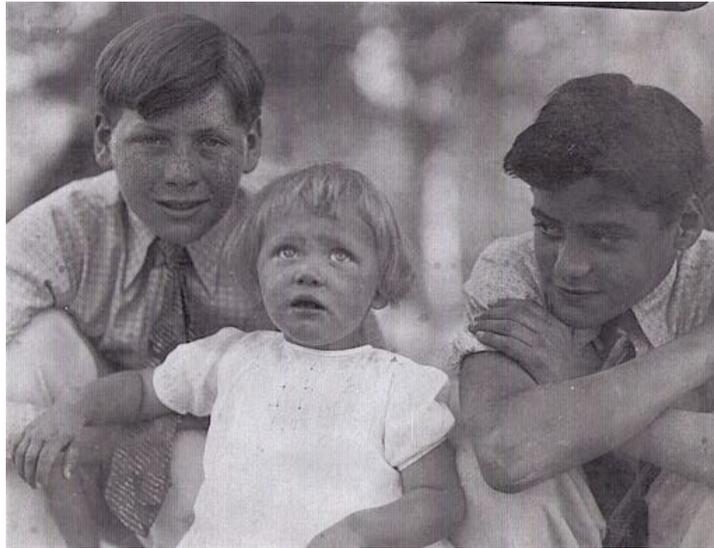


25. Whose Fleece Was Black As Coal



Mole Cole, Phyllis Cole, Jerry Cole

In the above photo you see three brothers and sisters: my uncle, my aunt, and my father: a freckled redhead, a blue-eyed blonde, and an Indian.

I've been told that my grandmother was an Abenaki Indian but I doubt that she could have been one-hundred percent Native American since my aunt and uncle had blue eyes. My sister Sally recently told me that she had heard that our great-grandmother was an Indian that they kept hidden in the attic, which is an interesting story but certainly false. We never met our grandmother. Sadly, she died quite young.

I don't know much about my ancestry, but I know that I inherited dark skin from my father. In third grade we were talking about human traits and races and one of the students asked, "What about Tommy?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Rogers. "Tommy has very, very dark skin."

In the photo to the left you can see my twin brother at around fourteen years old.



He also had that dark skin.

Although it's true that we grew up in Arizona, you can see that our friend Jan Bradbury on the left in the photo doesn't have that skin color and he lived under the same desert sun.

In those days, there was even more racism than today and it could be a stigma to be too dark. You ran the risk of being the butt of jokes. That didn't bother me at all, but I remember what happened to me at ten years old in fifth grade.

Our teacher, Joseph Spracale, quoted a line from the lyrics of the song, "Mary Had a Little Lamb." As a joke, he changed it from "Whose fleece was white as snow" to "Whose fleece was black as coal." Since my last name is Cole, some of the students burst out laughing.

Today my face has lightened a lot. I don't know how nor why. Just the same, when I was touring Ireland, the theme of dark skin came up again. Two musicians in a farm house asked our group of tourists if anyone would sing with them. I, of course, volunteered.

"What do you want to sing?" they asked. "Do you know an Irish song?"

"Of course," I told them. "The Rose of Tralee!"

We sang it and afterwards they asked me where I was from and I told them Arizona.

"No wonder you have such dark skin," one of them said.

They put their arms next to mine to compare the color.



The musicians with whom I sang on the ninth of May 2011 in Ireland