

“The untold story about the missing link between J. Edgar Hoover,
Joseph McCarthy, Howard Hughes and Marilyn Monroe...”

Shrewd Little Sleuth



SCOTT LECKIE

SHREWD LITTLE SLEUTH

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Author's Note: In researching this story, I reviewed thousands of pages of documents and letters from various sources including hundreds of pages provided by the FBI in 2002 in connection with a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) search and numerous books covering the historical period dealt with in this book. I have interviewed everyone still living, of whom I am aware, who personally knew ABL. I used quotation marks for direct text quotations from the primary sources, including personal documents from ABL's remaining files. On other occasions, quotation marks appear in fictional dialogues based on historical facts and materials of the time. Many of the interviewee's memories may or may not be accurate. I created this account based on personal memories and research, predominantly in the form of documents and interviews. When necessary, sections blend real and imagined events, as consistently as possible, using cultural attributes of the historical epoch they cover.

Disclaimer: This book uses my memory of dialogue and insights that may have changed over time. Allegations, finger pointing, or contentions of human culpability that you may read in this book should be taken as my opinion and not necessarily as an assertion of fact. Because I intentionally camouflage some of this book's various identities, leading to changing the factual background on occasion, you may find that I have purposely changed the identifying features of many individuals to protect their privacy.

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He was a G-Man. He was a lady's man. And given with whom he worked and where he hung out, he was probably a man's man too. He was a big drinker.

And a super spy.

Two decades after his excruciating dismissal from the FBI he loved so much, he married J. Edgar Hoover's secretary. Did he love her?

He worked with Marilyn Monroe, Joseph McCarthy, Howard Hughes, Marlon Brando, and many more.

A FOIA search unearthed 533 documents from the FBI, but they withheld ninety more. What didn't they want the world to know?

He was the father of my father, who never spoke about him. He was also the man whose legacy I inherited, and because of that, more than a little familial karmic cleansing has been required.

This is the story of my grandfather, Arthur Bernard Leckie, a shrewd little sleuth who might have known just enough to get him killed thirty-six hours before Marilyn's death just up the road.

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**Shrewd
Little
Sheuth**

Scott Leckie



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Introduction

Bringing My Father's Father Back to Life

Sometimes, a single person can encapsulate an entire era. A single lifetime can entwine the strands of history, providing a reasonably clear vision of life so many decades ago. And when that person to whom that lifetime belonged was a grandfather you never knew, there's invariably a story to be discovered and told.

As a child, my grandfather, Arthur Bernard Leckie (ABL), remained a mystery to me. I recently discovered part of the extraordinary life he had led—this jolly, heavy-drinking, Hollywood Noir incarnate straight out of a Raymond Chandler novel. More than once, the newspapers of the day praised him, though the term “a shrewd little sleuth” lacks the intended compliment.

My father never spoke of his father to anyone, but I inherited his legacy. This mysterious man is a part of me, and I will forever be a part of him. I, his progressive, international human rights lawyer grandson whom, of course, he never met, was more than a little puzzled by recent discoveries I made that my grandfather was deeply connected to the US empire and numerous client regimes.

As a globetrotting writer and human rights activist, I have spent my life working in over eighty countries with several of the NGOs, the United Nations (UN), and organizations I founded. I've always fought for human rights for everyone, everywhere, and never given up on my vision of a unified humanity where all enjoy every human right, every moment of their lives. Indeed, it has gotten stronger as the years have rolled by, faster and faster with each passing year. I do not see people as their nationalities or citizenships. These are invisible to me, except when such identities are used as grounds for discrimination or oppression by another, more dominant, group; at that point, they become all-encompassing. Under normal circumstances, however, I see people as people; all of us are inherent parts of the human family—none more or less important than any other. A single species of *homo sapiens* all sharing a single planet.

Imagine my distress, therefore, when I first learned about my grandfather's work and how it seemed to run counter to all my life's

efforts in a small way. It seems up to me to enact some form of familial karmic cleansing to undo the sins of my grandfather. How could I, a perpetual Green Party voter, writer and international human rights lawyer dedicated to alleviating the suffering of the poor, reconcile with a family background involving some of the worst human rights abuses witnessed in 20th-century US history?

Near the end of this process, I suddenly realized that today I am the sleuth; I am sleuthing the sleuth. Perhaps—if I am lucky—I may just out-sleuth the shrewd little sleuth and find out my grandfather's absolute identity. How did he view the world? How ambitious was he? Did he cut corners? Was all that schmoozing just a show? Was he power-hungry? Did he seek fame and fortune, or did his version of justice drive him more than anything else? How easily did he love—and whom did he love? What was it that drove him to drink? How close was he really to Hoover and all the other closeted men of power with whom he (perhaps quite literally) rubbed shoulders with during his career? Was ABL a heretofore secret kind of “friend” to Hoover, much like the more famous Melvin Purvis or Guy Hottel, whose lives became increasingly entwined with Hoover's as time rolled on? Was ABL kind and compassionate? Or was he cruel and selfish? Was he an assassin? Was he murdered?

Even more interesting to me is the quest to answer: How much would my granddad and I have had in common? What joys would we have shared, and where would we have diverged? How would each of us have considered decisions when confronted with challenging questions and choices that could determine our life pathways?

After more than sixty years, I have uncovered some mysteries surrounding the colorful and topsy-turvy life of my grandfather, ABL, who was involved in major American political events. Though I never met my paternal granddad, we share a lot: two of my three names, a quarter of my genetic make-up, and more than a few character traits that I have just now discovered. Some of these I happily embrace. Others, not so much.

I learned that less than thirty-six hours before dying in highly suspicious circumstances, surrounded by intrigue, mystery, and all the rest, he energetically danced for joy upon hearing the date of my impending birth, his first grandchild. Knowing now of his happiness about my pending arrival into this world instinctively brings me closer to this mysterious man. But as I've also discovered in this sixty-second year since his death, in our worldviews and the choices we made in our working and personal lives, we had more than a few deviations, some of which are as different as could be, with others nothing short of terrifying.

As a lifelong social justice fighter, it's more than a tad difficult to

reconcile my embrace of humanity with the life of this quintessential American family member. He engaged in spying, secret investigations, planting bugs and wiretaps, and exposing people for their political views. He calculated proximity to some of the most foul and destructive American political figures of the past century.

Perhaps I intuitively knew there was a need to clear the somewhat fouled air when I chose a life dedicated to human rights, even though I knew so little about ABL when I embarked on my global life. But despite all this, he was my granddad, my dad's dad, and all these decades later, I want to know this peculiar man more now. I want to try to bring him back to life so I can more deeply understand both him and me better.

Thanks to this intriguing figure finding himself, or more likely placing himself, right at the center of a series of critical historical epochs and events from the 1930s until his unexpected death in California in the early 1960s, there is just enough information out there still to give me a strong sense of the very full life he lived. In the days immediately after his death, there was so much more, but thanks to my highly conscientious and legally fearful father, off went 99.9% of that into the paper shredder and fire, never to be seen again. Three hundred boxes of immaculately kept files are gone for good.

But in putting all of the remaining pieces of this story together for the first time, instead of soothing any curiosity I might have had about ABL, I feel a sense of disquiet about both the man himself and what he endured in both private and professional realms. The very real possibility that his death did not only occur out of the blue but was brought upon him by something seriously sinister haunts me to the core.

My granddad left this life just a few short months before I was born in the same town where he died, the City of Angels, Los Angeles. He passed away at the young and tender age of fifty-seven when my dad was just twenty-nine, the exact age I was when I started learning some of the details of the following, extraordinary story. Given the grief I felt at my dad's sudden demise when I was well into my fifties, I still wonder how my father, just short of three decades old, dealt with his dad's equally unexpected death under nothing less than bewildering circumstances.

Although perhaps reminiscent to some as a sort of Walter Mitty-like character who lived in a fantasy world of sought-after but elusive meaning, this intriguing man was, in fact, far more like a real-life Forrest Gump. He seemed to be strategically placed right in the middle of a series of major historical events during his adult life. Gump was there meeting President Kennedy, seeing action in the Viet Nam War, finding himself right in the center of the anti-war movement of the 1960s, and

experiencing the early, tragic days of AIDS firsthand. ABL was a core part of the early days of the FBI, at Pearl Harbor during World War II, managing security at the founding meeting of the UN, working as a spy for the stars, heading investigations with the anti-communist and human rights violating McCarthy witch hunts, and so much more. And then, there are all those links to Marilyn Monroe during her (and his) final days ...

My dad never mentioned his father as I grew up in Southern California before I decided to very intentionally and permanently expatriate myself from the United States at the age of twenty-two. As a result, I spent my youth with almost no knowledge of the life of my grandfather other than a single memento, a hand-drawn penciled portrait—described by the artist Jerry Doyle as a cartoon—of ABL with a similar-looking man looming over him, as if intentionally placing himself into a position of suggestive domination, a hand sensually laid onto ABL's right shoulder. This unsettling drawing was presented to ABL at a testimonial dinner given in his honor on February 27, 1939, held at the Penn Athletic Club in Philadelphia, where he headed the local FBI office. A word bubble quote, which I memorized as a child, extends from the mouth of the speaker, says, "Leckie is one of our most outstanding agents. It is men like he that have made the organization what it is today." That agent was my granddad. The organization was the FBI. And the man to whom we can attribute that quote turned out to be none other than the controversial, first, and multi-decade boss of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), J. Edgar Hoover. A letter thanking Doyle and ABL for the cartoon from Hoover lets us know that he gratefully received a copy of this strange drawing of one of the FBI's first employees.

As a child, I was thankfully not brought up in a religious household, though parts of the Leckie clan were and still are deeply religious, fundamentally so. In one of the few attempts by my parents to interest me in the pursuit of eternal life, I was forced to attend a session of Sunday school at a local Presbyterian church. Though only eleven years old, I felt so averse to this idea that I intentionally shut the index finger of my left hand into the door of my maternal grandmother's yellow *Corvair*—a notoriously dangerous car model made famous by Ralph Nader's book *Unsafe at Any Speed*—breaking the finger in the process and wailing in so much agony that I permanently avoided joining the God Squad. And yet, despite my early aversion to deity-based beliefs, as much as I may respect people's wishes to have soul-soothing faith in such things, for a time during my early years, I was nonetheless somehow instilled with an overwhelming sense of fear of an all-powerful god. This god controlled everything, punishing those who strayed from righteousness. In my

juvenile mind's eye, Hoover loomed over my seated and subservient grandfather, like God himself. Whenever I would think of God, it was not the image of an old White man with a beard floating in the sky but the wavy hair of Hoover, who amassed god-like powers that destroyed the lives of a great many people, my granddad included. Knowing what we know now, all these decades later, with his right hand visible atop ABL's shoulder, the absence of his left hand raises questions.

Known by many names, including The Bulldog and even The State Within the State, Hoover infamously ran the FBI with an iron grip for nearly fifty years, throughout the terms of eight successive presidents, starting with the driving force behind the League of Nations, Woodrow Wilson in 1924, and ending with the disgraced and corrupt Richard Nixon in 1972. Among other highly questionable practices, Hoover notoriously compiled and kept compromising career-destroying files on numerous major politicians or other people of influence in the country. Far from dedicating himself solely to the important work of protecting the American population from criminals and the crimes they committed, he instrumentally turned many elements of the leading domestic law enforcement agency in the US into tools of oppression and nothing less than human rights abuses.¹ Hoover demanded blind loyalty from his staff. He imparted an organizational worldview known by all who worked under him: if any information came to light involving the White House or high echelons of political power, it would be brought to his attention first, presumably to bolster the secret files. Hoover intentionally instilled fear in countless people, and his once sterling reputation during the first decades of the FBI spiraled markedly downwards toward the end of his life as his more dubious methods and agenda became more widely known.

One writer recounted the views of former Acting Attorney General Laurence Silberman, the first person to peruse Hoover's secret files after his death, who noted that, "J. Edgar Hoover was like a sewer that collected dirt. I now believe he was the worst public servant in our history."² The sheer scale of his secret files is staggering. Hoover kept hundreds of files in his office comprising 17,750 pages, many of which held compromising sexual material on at least 164 people.³ Presidents, politicians, entrepreneurs, actors, activists, and others feared Hoover, but my

¹There are numerous books written about Hoover's misdeeds, and among many others, any of Athan Theoharis' 23 books will reveal every single tidbit of the FBI leader's often unsavory ways of doing things. For those interested, consider starting your reading with this: Athan Theoharis, *Spying on Americans: Political Surveillance from Hoover to the Huston Plan*, Temple University Press, 1978.

²Anthony Summers, *The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover*, Pocket Books, 1993, p. 221.

acquiescent granddad did not—at least not initially.

Hoover was once untouchable but no longer. Now, more than fifty years after his death, growing voices request a renaming of the FBI headquarters building, which is named after Hoover, because of his controversial views and practices.⁴ His legacy is rightfully tarnished forever; there is no doubting that.

In early August 1992, several years after my human rights life began⁵, I briefly returned to Southern California with my Dutch girlfriend, whom I was living with in Utrecht at the time. One night, we took my dad out to dinner at a small Italian bistro on Balboa Island in Newport Beach, and much to my amazement, after a few glasses of excellent dry white wine, my dad—a rare teardrop forming in his eye—suddenly blurted out, “My dad died thirty years ago today.” Because he *never* spoke about his dad during my early years, he stunned me by even mentioning him. My dad’s cousin, Chuck Leckie, believes that it took my father thirty years to begin spilling the beans simply because, in a heartbreakingly truthful remark that I fear is all too accurate, my dad tragically “didn’t want his dad to be a part of him.” ABL—as we all have—had many sides, some good, some not so good, and some of these deeply affected my father long after his father’s death. The elements of his personality and lifestyle that may have disturbed my sensitive dad are one thing. The central role he played in pivotal political moments, some of which became shameful events in US history, is something else entirely.

By this time, I had been politically active throughout the world for several years. I understood the importance of protecting human rights and, thus, just how dangerous a man Hoover turned out to be. I jumped at the chance of finally asking my dad to tell us something more than what that strange drawing depicted. In 1992, all I knew were a handful of FBI stories and the creepy cartoon; everything else I’ve learned started that night, increasing again in the past few months while I began writing this story. Somehow, this anniversary loosened something within my father, heavily helped, I suspect, by the effects of the wine on a man who never drank too much, starkly contrasting with his heavily alcoholic father. That evening, he let loose, unloading an incredible array of stories about the life

³Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: De Man en Zijn Geheimen* (English: J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and His Secrets), Toren Boeken, 1991, p. 29.

⁴<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2022-05-02/j-edgar-Hoover-name-fbi-director-fbi-building-racist-homophobic-legacy>.

⁵My forthcoming memoir, *Mr. Housing Rights: The Joyous Highs and Devastating Low of an Eccentric Human Rights Life* gives detailed accounts of many elements of my ongoing human rights career. See also: www.scottleckie.com.au.

of his father, none of which I had ever heard before.

My grandfather was born in Alabama, although I always thought he was born in New Jersey, the place ABL went to live briefly after his stint at the FBI ended. I knew of our family links to the American South, a place so different from the gentle coastal Southern California life of Orange County that I grew up in, but I never imagined that ABL grew up there. During my early years, I didn't really understand the implications of this, even though my first name was inherited from ABL's sister, my Great Aunt Mary Scott Godbold, whom people called Scottie.

Without knowing the area's history or the gruesome details of the US Civil War, the Confederacy, slavery, segregation, the Ku Klux Klan, George Wallace, and others, I loved visiting Mary Scott and her stern husband, John, when I was quite young. Everything felt different the second we disembarked at Montgomery Airport. It was like entering another world, something which surely must have helped to spark my lifelong love of travel and visiting new and unknown places. It is difficult to describe the feeling of awe that occurs every time I visit a new place, something I have had the good fortune to feel hundreds upon hundreds of times over the years. We would drive what seemed a great distance from Mary Scott and John's house in the small town of Camden after drinking overly sweet homemade lemonade with still not-yet-dissolved sugar granules visible at the bottom of the condensation-laden glass—a desperate attempt to cool off from the oppressive humidity of the South. We would then reach a catfish restaurant located on a dark, gloomy, moss-covered bayou, where I was transported back in time to a place I could have never imagined existed in the real world.

Much of the information I've learned about my grandfather I gained through a successful FOIA search in 2002 that resulted in the acquisition of a tantalizingly thick box of over five hundred pages of FBI documents mentioning ABL and a vast array of his activities during his time at the Bureau from 1934–1939. Opening this box and leafing through these decades-old documents all about my granddad was a magical experience, like discovering buried treasure. The man I never knew suddenly came to life. In equal measure, however, it was also an immensely strange and somewhat disquieting feeling to hold copies of letters in my hands, the originals of which were once held by the hands of the infamous Hoover, with a still fresh-looking ink signature of the man who did so much to push American democracy and, in the end, my grandfather to the brink. One thing that stood out, though, was the indication in the cover letter from the Department of Justice that “623 pages(s) were reviewed, and 533 page(s) are being released.” What might be hiding in those missing ninety

pages? What could lurk there that the DOJ doesn't want to world to learn about?

From the late 1940s to the early 1960s, when he would visit his family, ABL, this new man, so positively impacted by the free-spirited energy of the West Coast, became a hero to many. His nephew Larry Godbold remembered that "As a kid, Uncle Bernard was like Superman. Having an uncle in the FBI and having all these stars as clients, my claim to fame was him. When he'd greet me, he'd reach into his pocket and pull out ten or more quarters, which seemed like a million dollars."

It was around this time that the issue of alcohol again came up. Larry told me, "Your grandfather was awfully colorful and had a great personality. He did like to drink a lot, which surprised me. We had a phone in the hall right outside my room, and sometimes, he would call real late at night to my mother (his sister), and I think he was calling from a bar. She was very supportive of him." I guess he used to like to drink and dial.

ABL, Bunny to his closest friends and family, was my father's father. He naturally died (or was killed), it's still not clear which, four months before I was born. He lived veiled in the world of the FBI's highest echelons and at the pinnacle of America's secrets and lies. But his true desires may have forced him to live a life cloaked in a closet because society didn't want to see what it preferred to ignore. It left the telling of his extraordinary life to a grandson he never knew.

In the pages that follow, I seek to bring out the man and his larger-than-life personality by recounting many of the major highs and lows of a truly interesting life. What follows is anything but a hagiography. It is entirely absent of any, at least intentional, palimpsest. More than anyone, I want to know the truth and what made my grandad tick. Whom did he love? What did he loathe? What did he do well? Where did he fail? Where did he go in his free time? What was his favorite drink? What did he believe in? How free or unfree did he feel? Did any swords of Damocles hang perpetually over his head? Did he live and die a happy and contented man, or did his demons come back to haunt him one by one?

In seeking answers to these and other queries, almost unintentionally, I came to know my grandad in previously unimagined ways. After six decades of him playing almost no role whatsoever in my life, I now know him so well that he frequently comes to me in my dreams, where we face each other smiling, conversing about a plethora of topics, our conversations always ending before he can answer the biggest question of all, "How did you *really* die, Grandad?"

Photographs of ABL

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