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BARROW
CLYDE C. BARROW
MAY V. BARROW
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THE CARETAKERS:
Buddy Barrow, Clyde Barrow's 71-year-old nephew, and Rhea Leen Linder, Bonnie Parker's 85-year-old niece, have been tending to the legacy of their infamous relatives (*inset*) since the mid-1990s.

BUDDY AND RHEA LEEN AND BONNIE AND CLYDE

Bonnie Parker wanted to be buried next to her lover, Clyde Barrow, but her mother refused to bind the infamous couple in death. Their descendants now say reuniting the bodies is the only way to bring closure to the story that tore these two families apart.
By Peter Simek
Photography by Steven Visneau



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RHEA LEEN LINDER AND BUDDY BARROW'S ATTORNEY

called the offices of the Crown Hill Memorial Park cemetery in northwest Dallas last summer with a seemingly simple question: how could his clients dig up their dead relative? Rhea Leen's aunt had been dead for 85 years. Her body had already been unearthed once, when it was moved to Crown Hill from a small cemetery near Fish Trap Lake in 1945. This sort of request was unusual but not unheard of. DeWayne Hughes, whose family has run Crown Hill since the mid-1960s, walked the attorney through all the signatures and permits they would need to gather. Toward the end of the conversation, Hughes asked whom they wished to disinter.

"Bonnie Parker," the lawyer said.

The phone went quiet.

Bonnie Parker—half of the infamous outlaw duo Bonnie and Clyde—is without a doubt the most famous resident of Crown Hill. Her gravestone is a shrine for pilgrims who, more than eight decades later, are still entranced by the story of the two young lovers from West Dallas whose crime spree became a tabloid sensation during the Great Depression and eventually transformed Bonnie and Clyde into American folk heroes. Today the pair is regarded as something like a 20th-century Romeo and Juliet, and their story has inspired films, popular songs, and books. On any given day, you will find fresh flowers, mementos, and letters left at Bonnie Parker's grave—as well as at the grave of Clyde Barrow, who is buried at Western Heights Cemetery, on Fort Worth Avenue, in West Dallas.

And it was that fact—that Bonnie lies in northwest Dallas while Clyde rests near the West Dallas neighborhood where the couple met—that prompted Rhea Leen, Bonnie's 85-year-old niece, and Buddy, Clyde's 71-year-old nephew, to contact Crown Hill. They want to reunite the lovers by moving Bonnie's body and burying it next to Clyde's.

It was, after all, Bonnie's dying wish to lie next to her lover forever. But Bonnie's mother wouldn't hear of it. "He had her in life," Emma said at the time. "He can't have her in death."

Emma's reaction is understandable. Bonnie and Clyde's gang allegedly killed nine police officers and several civilians during the couple's brief life of crime. The murders devastated their families. In subsequent decades, each member of the family had to endure some measure of the shame, ignominy, and indignation that came with being a Barrow or a Parker. They were attacked, harassed, and imprisoned. They fled their homes. They hid from neighbors, police, and the media. They tried to forget all about Bonnie and Clyde.

So why do the families now want to dig up Bonnie? The spectacle would only thrust them back into the spotlight. Rhea Leen and Buddy can explain. Many of the details in this story—about their motivations and their familial legacy—have never before been published.

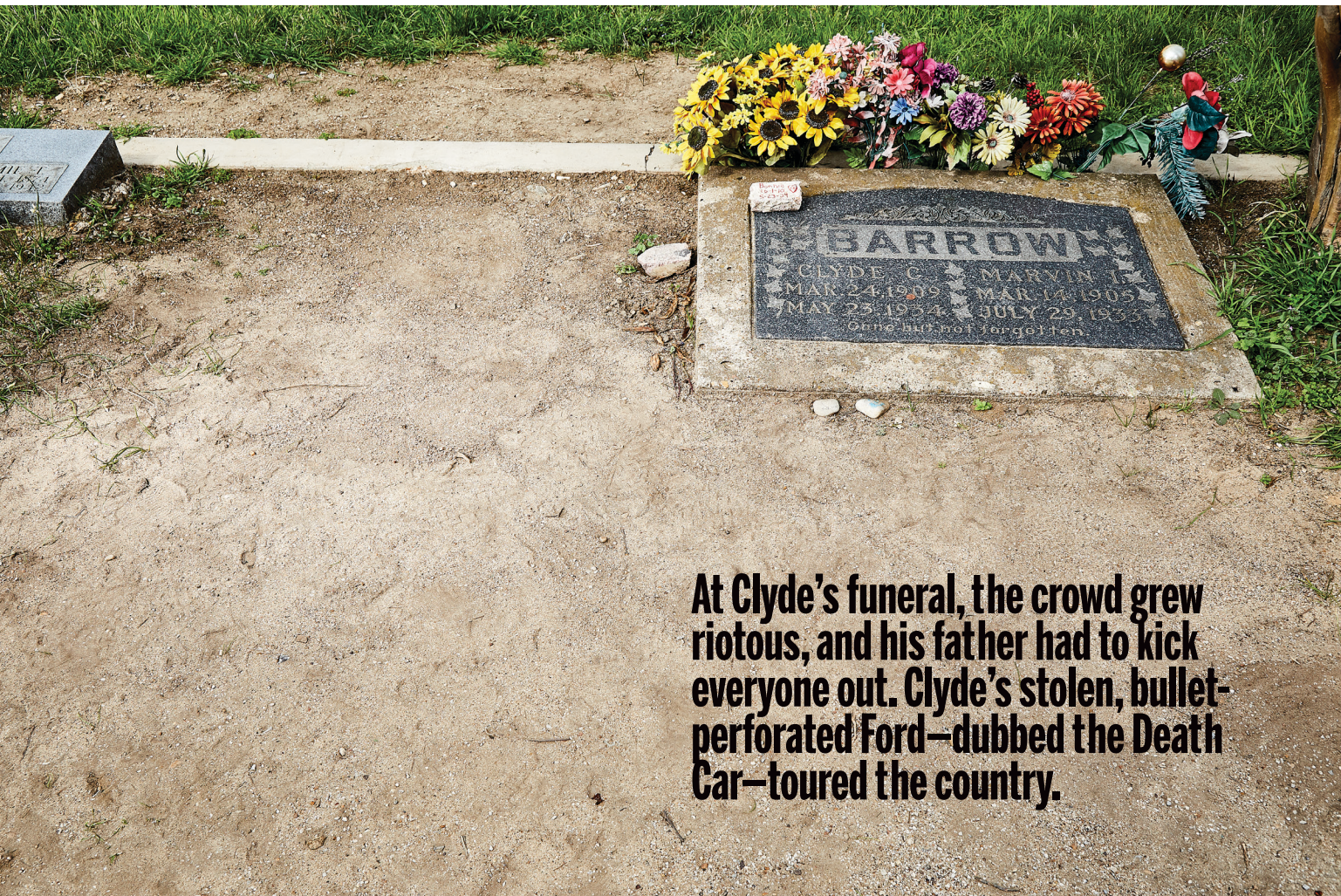
THERE WAS LITTLE PEACE IN West Dallas in the late 1920s. Known as The Devil's Back Porch, the neighborhood had a reputation as a den of scoundrels, gangsters, and two-bit hoods. For three generations, the Barrow family had eked out a meager existence as sharecroppers in Florida, Alabama, and East Texas. Now the family trickled into West Dallas, one sibling at a time. Like many other families fleeing the rural poverty of the time, they settled in crude work camps along the Texas and Pacific Railroad tracks or in pop-up shantytowns under the Trinity River viaducts.

The Barrow sisters Artie and Nelly came first. They were followed by their brothers Buck and the eldest, Elvin "Jack" Barrow. Soon their father, Henry, and mother, Cumie, arrived with the youngest two children, Marie and L.C., followed by Clyde, the last to join the city life. The brothers were all good with their hands and had a knack for fixing cars. Before the Depression hit, they managed to scrape together enough money to build a small filling station on Singleton Boulevard.

It proved difficult to resist the pull of the criminal underworld that defined the Barrow boys' neighborhood. Cops looking to finger suspects for crimes often picked up young men wandering around West Dallas. After Clyde was busted for a few petty crimes, police began to haul him in for questioning regularly. They would take him downtown, interrogate him, and release him. Sometimes, before Clyde could walk the 2 miles back to West Dallas, another team of cops would pick him up and bring him back downtown. The harassment made holding a job difficult, and it taught Clyde a couple of lessons. If you are already being treated like a criminal, you might as well reap some of the benefits of a life of crime. And, to survive in Dallas, you needed a car.

The automobile plays a leading role in the legend of Bonnie and Clyde. Stories of their exploits always end with Bonnie and Clyde zooming off down a two-lane road, leaving police in their dust. Photographs of the couple on the lam featured a petite, flapperlike Bonnie flashing her wry, pretty smile—revolver playfully dangling from her delicate hand, leg suggestively propped up on the bumper of a Ford. Clyde stole only Fords with big V-8 engines that gave him an advantage over the cars driven by local law enforcement.





At Clyde's funeral, the crowd grew riotous, and his father had to kick everyone out. Clyde's stolen, bullet-perforated Ford—dubbed the Death Car—toured the country.

But life on the road with Bonnie and Clyde wasn't glamorous. The gang spent long hours driving desolate back roads, sleeping in their car and bathing in creeks. The banks and stores they robbed provided only a hand-to-mouth existence. They relied on caravans of migrant farm workers to shelter and feed them. Clyde's brother Buck was shot and killed by the police while riding with the gang, and Buck's wife, Blanche, had her eye shot out before she was arrested. They were often homesick, and they arranged risky meetings with their families to obtain clean clothes, food, and medical supplies. Clyde's older sisters, who were beauticians, cut their hair.

After Bonnie and Clyde were finally ambushed and killed, these meetings would land both the Parkers and the Barrows in jail. Bonnie and Clyde's violent deaths—two Dallas police officers, a Louisiana sheriff and his deputy, and two Texas Rangers ambushed their car and emptied six automatic weapons into their bodies—only heightened the popular fervor surrounding the romantic outlaws. Thousands of people lined up outside McKamy-Campbell Funeral Home in South Dallas to view Bonnie's body, which was dressed, as the papers reported, in an "ice blue negligee." At Clyde's funeral, the crowd grew riotous, and his father had to kick everyone out. After the funerals, as Clyde's stolen, bullet-perforated Ford—dubbed the Death Car—toured the country to rapturous crowds, the Parkers and Barrows were dragged into court on charges of harboring criminals. They became the first people ever convicted of harboring;

GRAVE MATTER: Clyde Barrow is buried in a West Dallas cemetery. Beside his grave, there is already an open plot waiting for Bonnie Parker, whose current grave lies in northwest Dallas, on the other side of the city.

even Clyde's youngest sister Marie, only 14 at the time, received a sentence of two hours in police custody.

But Bonnie and Clyde's deaths marked only the beginning of their family's legal difficulties. After a barroom scuffle left a man dead at a club where Jack Barrow worked as a bouncer, the eldest Barrow boy—who was never actually involved in crime—received a life sentence for murder. L.C. Barrow was convicted of armed robbery in the late 1930s even though he was under police surveillance at the time of the crime and the officers knew he had nothing to do with it. Marie married a member of the Barrow gang and, after he was killed, married another convict who was also murdered. She fell in with the crew of Benny Binion—the gambling magnate and gangster—and served time in an Oklahoma prison.

The families' troubles weren't merely legal. Many of the West Dallas hoods believed Clyde's posthumous reputation as a larger-than-life outlaw was undeserved, and the Barrow boys often found themselves defending their family's honor. At L.C.'s welcome home from prison party, Baldy Whatley, a West Dallas gunrunner, started talking trash about the Barrow family. L.C. and his brother-in-law Joe Francis took Whatley outside, and Francis beat him to a pulp with brass knuckles. A few days later, Whatley showed up to the Barrow filling station with a makeshift bomb and a shotgun. The bomb was a dud, and it managed only to scorch an interior wall of the station. But when a car pulled up to the station, Whatley opened fire. He hit L.C.'s mother, Cumie, nearly killing her and blinding her in the left eye.

The stress and strain of life after Bonnie and Clyde's crime spree would prove enough to put both their mothers, Cumie Barrow and Emma Parker, in their graves within 11 years of losing their children.



The families fled West Dallas. Some of the Barrows moved near Fair Park. The Parkers wound up in East Dallas before settling farther out in the East Texas town of Gladewater. As the years passed, the families hoped the memory of Bonnie and Clyde would fade, but it never did. On every anniversary of their deaths, newspapers would run stories about the couple. “The kids are dead,” Bonnie’s sister Billie Jean Parker would say. “Why do we have to go through this every anniversary?”

Later in life, Billie Jean, Marie, and Buck’s widow, Blanche, would jokingly refer to “the call” they received from local law enforcement every time they moved to a new town.

“We know you moved here,” the officers would tell them. “And we know who you are.”

RHEA LEEN LINDER STARTED HER LIFE WITH A DIFFERENT name. She doesn’t remember her mother, and she doesn’t know why her mother did it, but she was named Bonnie Ray Parker, after her notorious aunt. Rhea Leen’s mother, Edith Ray Clay, married Bonnie’s brother, Hubert “Buster” Parker, in 1929. She died of meningitis in 1938, when Rhea Leen was only 4 years old. Rather than leaving Rhea Leen to be raised by a Parker, her maternal grandparents took her in.

Ada and Rusty Clay weren’t fit to raise a child. The Clays were alcoholics, and the rhythm of their life consisted of earning a few dollars only to blow the money on benders that lasted weeks at a time. “They would go sober for a while and everything was fine,” Rhea Leen says. “Then my grandfather would come home at lunch and find that my grandmother had started drinking. It began a two- or three-week binge. Then they would sober up, and my grandfather would go work in some oil field.”

THE NOTORIOUS GANG: The photo above was taken the day before Bonnie and Clyde were ambushed and gunned down in their car. Back row (from left): Billie Jean Parker, Clyde Barrow, Cumie Barrow, and L.C. Barrow. Front row: Marie Barrow, Emma Parker, and Bonnie Parker.

The search for work and drink took Rhea Leen and her grandparents on an odyssey from Texas to Oklahoma to Arkansas and back. Sometimes they would hitchhike. Other times they would catch a bus while intoxicated, which would get them kicked off in the middle of nowhere. They found their way to Houston, where, during one long, Sunday boozing session in a park, the police arrived. They arrested Rusty and Ada and took Rhea Leen to an orphanage. A new nightmare began. The little blond girl who shared her aunt’s slight build, charming smile, and flashing green eyes was quarantined for weeks after arriving at the orphanage, standing alone and confused at the locked door to her room, listening to the sounds of children echoing through the halls. She remembers another time being forced to sit in an empty dark hallway until midnight as punishment for not hanging her clothes properly in the closet.

“I was terrified,” Rhea Leen says. “I was absolutely terrified.”

It took years for the Parker side of Rhea Leen’s family to find her. A few weeks before Rhea Leen’s seventh birthday, her father, Hubert, and aunt Billie Jean drove down to Houston to pick her up. At first, the rescue was hardly a relief. Rhea Leen didn’t remember her family. As far as the little girl was concerned, she had been rescued by complete strangers.

After the orphanage, Rhea Leen moved in with Billie Jean in East Dallas. Years later, she would come to understand why her

father didn't play a role in raising her. Buster Parker was crippled by being Bonnie's brother. "He would blame all of his problems on Bonnie," Rhea Leen says. "And I used to get so aggravated at him. 'Daddy, Billie Jean was the one who went to prison for Bonnie. Billie Jean was the one that helped Bonnie.' But I wasn't thinking of him being the one who was 'Buster Parker' his whole life."

During the 30 years between Bonnie's death and Buster's death in 1964, he lived with cousins in Irving. He rarely worked and mostly drank. Rhea Leen remembers her father as a sweet and quiet man when sober, but once he had a few drinks in him, he would "argue with a fence pole."

"If you don't put anything into life, you don't get anything out," Rhea Leen says. "And that was written for my dad."

In Billie Jean, however, Rhea Leen found the mother she never had. Billie Jean's own two children had died of disease only days apart when they were 2 and 4. In a personal account Billie Jean later wrote about her sister Bonnie, she remembers how the deaths devastated their aunt, who doted on the girl and boy. Now, Billie Jean took in 7-year-old Bonnie Rhea Parker as her own. They moved to Gladewater, and Billie Jean got a job at a roadside beer joint. They lived in a little house behind the bar.

The long shadow of Bonnie and Clyde still hung over the little family, even if, as a child, Rhea Leen didn't know who her namesake was. She didn't understand why all the other children at school didn't like her. Some of the other little girls told her that their mothers said they couldn't play with her. She asked the school bus driver to drop her off a quarter-mile from her house so that her classmates wouldn't see that she lived behind a roadhouse bar.

"I didn't know why," Rhea Leen says. "I was a nice little skinny gal. It was never discussed at all. I didn't know anything about anything."

There were a lot of family secrets. Once, in the 1940s, Billie Jean took Rhea Leen on a train to Kansas to visit her uncle Clarence, who was serving more than a decade on a kidnapping charge he picked up while running with the Barrow gang. When Rhea Leen was in the fifth grade, Billie Jean married a man she'd met in the bar, and the three of them moved to Arkansas. There, Billie Jean changed Bonnie Ray's name to Rhea Leen. Her aunt never explained why, but the name change allowed Rhea Leen to begin to live something like a normal life. Billie Jean eventually divorced, and she and Rhea Leen moved back to Dallas. Rhea Leen attended Greiner Middle School. Dated boys. Went out dancing. Married young. Raised children. Divorced and married again. Found a steady clerical job at a metal manufacturing facility on South Lamar.

Over time, Rhea Leen learned about her aunt Bonnie in much the same way everyone learns about Bonnie—stories in newspapers, shows on television, rumors, gossip. Occasionally, when her aunt Billie Jean got together with her friends Blanche and Marie, the old women would have a few beers, and stories about the old days would slip out. But for most of her life, Rhea Leen neither asked nor spoke about Bonnie Parker. Her first husband went to his grave without ever knowing he was married to Bonnie's niece.

"I have friends right now who don't have a clue," she says. "I wouldn't know how to bring it up if I wanted to. You don't run and hide from something your whole life—I mean literally hide from it—and then all of a sudden get interested in it."

BUDDY BARROW WAS 7 YEARS OLD WHEN, ONE SUNDAY WHILE visiting his aunt Marie, he found a scrapbook laying open on a coffee table in the living room. Taped to the page was an image of a 1934 Ford Model 730 Deluxe Sedan perforated with hundreds of bullet holes. The little boy had never seen anything like it.

"Whoa," he thought. "What's that?"

His father, L.C. Barrow, appeared in the doorway.

Years later, Rhea Leen would come to understand why her father didn't play a role in raising her. Buster Parker was crippled by being Bonnie's brother. "He would blame all of his problems on Bonnie."

"Outside, boy," L.C. barked.

Buddy was used to being shooed out of rooms. Once, when his aunts were giving the Barrow boys haircuts at his grandfather's house, Clyde's name came up and Henry Barrow immediately told Buddy to go outside and play. Out back, Buddy pressed his ear to a fan that sat in the window, and through the buzz of the blades he heard fantastic stories about an uncle he had never met, bank robberies, shootouts, police chases, outlaws, gunslingers, and a big Ford.

Buddy would have to wait until he was a teenager before he could hear more about uncle Clyde. L.C. Barrow rarely spoke about it, even though Buddy's old man had ridden with Clyde. L.C. was a firm, taciturn man. It was said that Clyde trusted L.C. more than anyone besides his mother, Cumie. L.C. was the most handsome of the Barrow brood, with a broad forehead, thick chestnut hair, high cheekbones, and a wily smile. He shared his older brother's big, floppy ears, though resembling Clyde was a liability. By the time Buddy was born, his father had served jail sentences for harboring his brother, armed assault, and violating his parole by crossing into Kansas to bail his sister Marie out of jail. L.C. would later be busted for writing hot checks and drunken driving. In all, during his 66 years on earth, L.C. would spend 30 of them in jail.

But Buddy adored his pop. One Christmas, his father, knowing how much Buddy liked working with his hands, gave him a model car engine, which the boy took apart and put back together in a few hours. Then, around Buddy's seventh birthday, L.C. disappeared. At first, his mother didn't explain where he had gone. Instead, she told her son that another man was going to come by and meet him. Later that day, a large car pulled up in front of the house, and a special officer named L.C. Williams told Buddy to get in. They drove to a juvenile detention center in Dallas, where Williams dropped off Buddy. Buddy spent the day there not knowing if he was visiting the center or incarcerated. What he did know was that the place was hell.

"Do I have your attention?" Williams asked Buddy when he returned in the evening to pick him up. "You learn anything?"

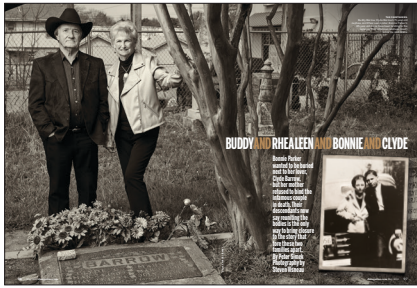
When he got home, Buddy's mom asked about his day.

"I don't ever want to go back to that guy," he said. "He took me to jail."

That guy, it turned out, was Buddy's biological father, and his mother was still legally married to him. A few days later, she took Buddy with her to California and their precarious situation would soon become clear. L.C. had been arrested again and was serving time in San Quentin State Prison. They stayed in California for two years, until he was released, and Buddy's parents returned to Texas to settle the divorce. A judge ruled that Buddy's biological father would get custody. He was sent to live with a rich aunt who had a large home overlooking White Rock Lake and a chauffeur who drove Buddy to school every day. Buddy was miserable.

As far as Buddy can tell, his mother was seeing L.C. Barrow on and off since high school, long before she married L.C. Williams or he was born. Whether L.C. Barrow or L.C. Williams is Buddy's real father, the young boy appeared to have inherited many

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BONNIE AND CLYDE

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of the Barrows' distinguishing traits. He had a knack for mechanics and an appetite for mischief. He and his boyhood friends indulged in pranks and minor rackets. For laughs, they lifted parked cars on the street and moved them onto the sidewalks. For spending money, they broke into the Dallas bus depot to steal pocket change out of the seat cushions.

Eventually, Buddy was able to convince his biological father to allow him to live with his mother and L.C. Barrow. After San Quentin, L.C. had found work as a truck driver for a company run by Ted Hinton, one of the two Dallas cops who had ambushed and killed Bonnie and Clyde in Louisiana. Later in life, Hinton, perhaps to assuage his guilt, became close with the Barrow family. In the summers, L.C. would take Buddy on trucking trips, and occasionally his father would point out places where he and his brothers had adventured along the road.

"He would start to tell a story, but when I asked a question, he said, 'Let's not talk about this,'" Buddy says. "I learned quick to shut up and listen."

While driving with his father, Buddy also learned what it meant to be a Barrow. "My dad couldn't get a traffic ticket without law enforcement knowing who he was," Buddy says.

Buddy remembers being with his father during one traffic stop when the police handcuffed L.C. and berated him: "So, you are one of those badass Barrow boys?"

Later, L.C. confronted Buddy. "You know, son, I brought shame upon my family," L.C. said. "I want you to promise you'll never do that to me and your others."

"OK, Pop," Buddy said.

Soon enough, Buddy's father was arrested again, this time for drunken driving—or "dancing with the Indians," as L.C. called it. With no father at home, Buddy and his friends got into deeper trouble. When he was 14, some of Buddy's friends got arrested for something Buddy still won't talk about today. What he will say is that if his friends had ratted him out, Buddy would have been convicted of a fel-

ony. But they didn't, and Buddy understood that fate had handed him a second chance.

"Everything Clyde tried, the door was slammed in his face," Buddy says. "It wasn't because he wanted it to happen. It's just that the right door would not open. But it opened for me, and I realized that this is the time for me to straighten myself up."

Buddy asked L.C. Williams if he could move back in. Williams agreed, but only if Buddy promised to get good grades. If he did, his second father would buy him a car. That was all the motivation Buddy needed. He worked hard and got his car. In high school, he souped up hot rods and drag raced. After finishing school, Buddy was drafted into the Army during the Vietnam War. When he came home, he worked as an auto-body technician for 43 years, restoring classic automobiles from the early 1930s on the side.

In 1967, the Academy Award-winning movie *Bonnie and Clyde* was released, and the film did more than any other book or song to cement the legend of Bonnie in popular culture. The families felt the film's characters were grotesque manipulations of reality, but those depictions reignited the public's appetite for Bonnie and Clyde.

"When the movie came out, it opened Pandora's box," Buddy says. "We were hounded like we were circus freaks."

The two families fled to Henderson County, where they actually grew closer. They bought homes near Cedar Creek Lake. Blanche, Billie Jean, and Marie became inseparable friends, fishing in the lake, sipping beer on the dock, and reminiscing about the old days. Blanche, half-blind from the injury she received while running with Bonnie and Clyde, would swing her rod around wildly, sometimes knocking people off the tiny dock. Once, she and Billie Jean were in line at a grocery store when a woman asked them to keep an eye on her purse.

"If they only knew who we were," Blanche cracked.

Even L.C. Barrow and L.C. Williams became fishing and hunting buddies later in life. When they died, they were buried in the same plot of land, one on each side of Buddy's mother, Leona. Once again, Bonnie and Clyde slowly passed into the background of their lives, and Buddy fondly remembers his family's later years out at Cedar Creek Lake as peaceful ones.

IN THE WEEKS AND MONTHS AFTER Bonnie and Clyde's death, Bonnie Parker's mother, Emma, tried to get in front of the story that was changing the way the world thought about her daughter and her family. In 1934, Emma co-authored a

book about Bonnie and Clyde that focused on the family's experience of the ordeal. She traveled the country as part of a circuit that featured the family members of disgraced criminals, such as the mother of bank robber John Dillinger, in a show that was billed, at least on the surface, as an attempt to highlight the true cost of crime. Emma wanted to tell the world that her daughter was not the dangerous, gun-wielding vixen portrayed in the press, but rather a funny, imaginative young girl caught up in a horrific situation she couldn't escape. As a PR campaign, it was both ineffective and short-lived.

By the 1990s, however, another member of the family reentered the spotlight to tell the family's side of the story. Marie Barrow had been married three times—twice to underworld figures who met violent deaths—and had no children. She served a few stints in jail herself before living a quiet, law-abiding life in the country. Now in her 70s, she began to show up at Bonnie and Clyde-themed events—exhibitions, book releases, the annual convention in Gibsland, Louisiana, which is capped each year with a gruesome reenactment of the bloody ambush. Marie noticed two things about the public's perception of her brother and his girlfriend. The first was that people were still being fed a fiction. The second, however, was that to most people, Bonnie and Clyde were remembered affectionately as romantic folk heroes, not vicious cop killers.

Marie saw something else about the obsession with her brother's story. There were a lot of people who had nothing to do with the family who were making a lot of money off the public's enthusiasm for Bonnie and Clyde. Perhaps the best way Marie could honor the memory of her brother Clyde was to get a piece of that action.

"Dollar signs, man, you know?" Buddy says.

Marie was a tough, no-nonsense firebrand with a razor-sharp wit and a towering white coif. She shared Clyde's mischievous grin and Bonnie's penchant for playing to the camera by posing with loaded weapons. Marie worked a lot of angles. In 1993, she co-authored a book that once again told the families' side of the story. She worked with a production company to make a documentary. When she learned that Buddy was restoring a 1934 Ford sedan identical to the one Bonnie and Clyde were driving when they were ambushed in Louisiana, Marie saw opportunity.

"Hurry up and get through this," Marie told Buddy. "We're going to shoot a bunch of holes in it and we could make \$5 a head."

"Marie!" Buddy shot back. "We ain't going to poke holes in a \$50,000 automobile."

Historian Charles Herd first met Marie at an event at the Dallas Public Library. He remembers a woman who understood that correcting the record on Bonnie and Clyde required a certain amount of give and take. "She went along with things," Herd says. "But she would go, 'That ain't right,' or 'Mama didn't have that,' and 'Clyde wouldn't do that.'"

Marie gave Herd a signed copy of Emma Parker's book about Bonnie and Clyde and signed it: "To Charles, this is just a pack of lies."

Herd helped Marie organize the first auction of the family's collection of Bonnie and Clyde artifacts. The lawmen who shot them ransacked the car and kept Clyde's arsenal for their personal gun collections. A crowd gathered at the scene and tore off parts of the couple's bloodstained clothes and clipped locks of their hair. The Parkers had a collection of personal items, though some of them were lost in the 1950s when Emma's sister Pam set a storage shed on fire during a familial dispute whose origin no one can remember. Marie also lost some of her collection when her home caught on fire. But she still had a lot to sell, including the bloodstained shirt Clyde died in. Over the years, Buddy has amassed a collection of photographs, clippings, and artifacts. The market hasn't cooled. This month, Heritage Auction Gallery will host a sale of Bonnie Parker's handwritten poems.

By the mid-1990s, Marie roped Buddy and, perhaps more surprising, Rhea Leen into her effort to wrestle back the Bonnie and Clyde narrative. Since the days riding shotgun in his father's truck and listening to his tales, Buddy has been an avid collector of family lore. Rhea Leen's curiosity woke only later in life. Whenever she would hear or read about the family in the paper, she would call Marie or her aunt Billie Jean and ask if the stories were true. Marie began to invite her to accompany her to Bonnie and Clyde events. Later, Rhea Leen traveled to Gibsland with her daughter to attend the festival, and in recent years she has begun to engage with Facebook groups dedicated to the memory of her aunt. Rhea Leen continues to be amazed that the aunt who was the source of so much shame and suffering in her early life is now adored and celebrated.

"One woman has 'Bonnie' tattooed on her arm," Rhea Leen says. "Trust me, there ain't nobody in the Parker-Barrow family that's going to get their names on their bodies. Crazy stuff."

Marie died in 1999, but before she passed away she asked Buddy and Marie to continue her work. That meant pursuing an idea that Marie first hatched in the 1990s.

Whenever they would meet fans of Bonnie and Clyde, they heard one question over and over: why were Bonnie and Clyde buried in different cemeteries? They knew the answer. Bonnie's mother wanted it that way. But the more they repeated it, the less sense it made.

That's because in the decades since Bonnie and Clyde were buried, the story had changed. They were no longer regarded as murderers. More people saw them as two kids who'd come from nothing and never got much more than that, but who nonetheless tried to chase down their little piece of the American Dream. Their world was shaped by poverty and a lack of education, and their tragedy was driven by desperation and, ultimately, blind love. It was that youthful romance that drew people into the story and made Bonnie and Clyde stand for something people could admire.

Emma Parker didn't want her daughter to lie next to Clyde Barrow because Clyde had brought her family infamy. But through the strange fermentation of time, their romance has endured. If keeping Bonnie and Clyde apart was Emma Parker's way to seek closure for the bereaved families, Buddy and Rhea Leen now began to see reuniting the bodies as the only way to bring the story of Bonnie and Clyde to a conclusion.

"If she's going to be history, put her where history is," Buddy says. "Because that's where people want. They want to come and see them together."

MOVING BONNIE PARKER'S BODY IS not going to be easy. According to Buddy and Rhea Leen, as soon as DeWayne Hughes heard they wanted to dig up his most famous resident, his demeanor changed, and the process became more complicated. Hughes declined to speak about the matter at length, citing legal concerns, but he says that moving Bonnie Parker's body will require a court order.

Buddy and Rhea Leen are confident they will prevail, but the process will take time and money. Charles Herd, who is assisting the family, says they plan to create a nonprofit that can raise money for the exhumation, a funeral and reburial, a new gravestone, restoration of the Western Heights Cemetery, and, potentially, a forensic autopsy. Bonnie and Clyde aficionados hope an autopsy will resolve an old story that one of the lawmen fired a bullet through Bonnie's temple after the ambush. The autopsy may also put to rest a lingering rumor that Bonnie Parker was pregnant at the time of her death—a story the family vehemently insists is false.

One thing the families don't have to

worry about is a gravesite. There is an empty spot in the Barrow plot right next to Clyde that Henry Barrow left vacant for Bonnie.

Bonnie and Clyde's story has taken Rhea Leen and Buddy around the world. They have been invited to Germany, Atlanta, New York, Boston, Louisiana, and other places to tell the story. Last year, at an event at the Civic Auditorium at the Allen Public Library, Buddy's appearance drew a standing-room-only crowd. He walked the audience through Bonnie's last poem, "The Trail's End," describing some of the locations she mentions and explaining some of the references. He talked about how Clyde worshiped Jesse James so much that he robbed some of the same banks and railroad depots as his idol. Buddy jokes that if the police had really wanted to catch Clyde, they could have simply followed the routes Jesse James had ridden around Kansas and Missouri, because Clyde was deliberately retracing them.

At the end of the presentation, a man stood up in the crowd with a question. He identified himself as the nephew of a man who had been killed by Clyde during a carjacking, and he wanted to know why they were glorifying the lives of murderers. Buddy had heard the question before, and he attempted to address it sympathetically, if a little defensively. There were more murders pinned on Clyde than can be proven he committed, Buddy said. In fact, some of the lesser-known members of the Barrow gang were often more trigger-happy than the gang's famous namesake.

But later, Buddy admitted to me that the question is exactly why the family stayed quiet for so long. "That's the reason why my family never wanted to discuss this," Buddy says. "They know there was a lot of heartache created by what Bonnie and Clyde actually did. This was not some kind of fabulous deal. This was heartbreaking. They lost family members, and other people lost family members."

But, he adds, it is also why Marie decided to start telling the family's side of the story and why she charged Buddy and Rhea Leen with continuing to tell that story after her death. It's why they continue to go to events. It's why they have come to realize that they must dig up Bonnie Parker's body. Closure doesn't come from hiding from the past, he says, but from looking at it straight in the eye.

"History is history," Buddy says. "You can't go back and change none of that. But you always leave the past open for the future." **D**

Write to peter.simek@dmagazine.com.