

6. The Descendants of Samuel Oscar Smith (1856-1920) and Mary Elizabeth Virginia Renfro (1869-1934) of Texas, Arizona. and California

32. Jesse Harvey Smith 30 DEC 1898 • Los Cruces, NM - 28 NOV 1969 • Beeler, Ness County, KS
 Margaret Grace Sturtevant 10 MAR 1903 • Wayne County, Iowa - 26 AUG 1929 • Soulsbyville, CA
 Married: 31 May 1928 • Los Angeles, California (Probably Pasadena)
 Lola Vera Bigler 14 JUL 1916 • Golconda, AZ - 18 OCT 1977 • Los Angeles County, CA
 Marriage: 7 Dec 1931 • Los Angeles, CA (again, probably Pasadena)
 Sylvia Fay McBride 21 JAN 1908 • Beeler, Ness, KS - 23 AUG 1989 • Beeler, Ness County, KS
 Married: About 1947 probably in Nevada



The only photo that I can find for Jesse and two of his wives are from Findagrave. Margaret does not have a photo except her death notice which I just added. I will post it below later. I found this one of Lola posted by Retha41 on FamilySearch along with several others.

Jesse was the third child born to Sam and Mary Smith in New

Mexico in 1898 shortly before they head back to Texas in a covered wagon. He shows up in the 1900 Census in Sterling County which has been described in his father's biography so we will skip ahead a few years as I haven't found much of significance in his early history. He was still at home in 1910 in Silver City, NM and continued living at home for the next 10 years, but sometime after 1910, they moved to Douglas, Arizona and Jesse got a job working for the railroad and had become a foreman. I wonder if his big sister Nannie's husband had any role in Jesse landing this job since he was a longtime railroad employee. In 1920, Jesse was called Harvey and was 22 and single. Nannie had married and William had disappeared 10 years earlier so he was the oldest son. He had a younger brother, Sam Jr, and two younger sisters, Velma and Dixie in their rented home in Douglas, Arizona. In 1917, Jesse registered for the WW1 Draft while still living in Douglas, AZ. He was living at home with his parents at 812 19th St, Douglas and was working for the Thomas Starett Co. which was apparently a company based in West Virginia that produced explosives most likely to serve all of the miners in the area. He was of medium height and build and had blue eyes and light hair. Interestingly, when he registered in Sep 1918, he was in West Virginia where is company was based and they must have sent his registration to his local board in Douglas. This creates a little confusion which I have not been able to unravel. Update 2025 – In looking more closely at the 1940 and 1950 Censuses, I found that in 1940, Jesse was living in Tonopah, NV next door to his future wife and step daughter, Sylvia and Mae Oller Meyers. Sylvia was a housekeeper for 60-year-old Paul Irwin. Looking at the 1950 Census, Sylvia and Jesse had married, son Walter had been born, but they were still living with Paul Irwin (Erwin) who was now 70.

Jesse's offspring and stepchildren from his and his wives' various relationships

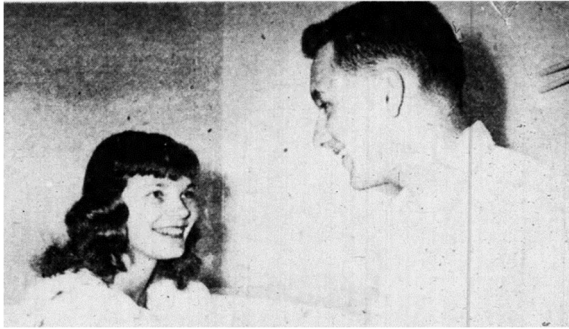
133	Wilhelmina Smith	1932		Jesse and Lola Child#1
132.2	May Ollie Myers	1928		Stepdaughter from Sylvia's first marriage to Lester Myers
134	Don Robert Smith	1933		Jesse Harvey and Lola's child#2
133.2	Darlene Ruggio	1939	2013	Lola and John's Child#1
133.3	Martin John Ruggio	1940	1984	Lola and John's Child#2
135	Walter P Smith	1948		Jesse and Sylvia's Only Child

I will mainly be documenting the direct descendants but will add as much about the stepchild as necessary to complete the narrative.

133. Wilhemina Smith 1 MAY 1932 • Los Angeles, CA – Living?

Kenneth Wiley Van Knighton 8 NOV 1930 • Hollywood, CA - 7 JUL 1999 • Los Angeles, CA

Marriage: 18 Jun 1949 • Los Angeles, CA



Wilhemina and Ken shortly after their marriage in a news article.

If you recall, Jesse's first wife died shortly after they married and he married a 2nd time to Lola Bigler and they had two children before divorcing. The first of these children was Wilhemina who arrived in LA in 1932. Let me note before I start, that I was afraid that this biography might not yield much information when I began because my experience is that the closer you get

to the present time, the less information you seem to be able to find. That being said, I may go off on some tangents, because when I started looking into Ken, it got quite interesting.

When she was 6 or 7, her parents divorced and her mother married John Ruggio and had two more children before 1940 so in Wilhemina's first census appearance, she and her little brother Don appear with John, Lola, and stepsiblings Darlene and Martin at 2725 Johnston St, Los Angeles where her stepfather worked in a car factory. That location is just NW of downtown LA where Dodger Stadium is today. She was 7 and had just finished 1st grade. I didn't find much about her before 1949 when she married Ken Knighton. He was 18 and she was 17 and shortly after their wedding, their photo appeared in the LA Evening news with the following caption:

SETTING UP HOUSEKEEPING	
Oh, oh, don't put bananas in the refrigerator. Playing the role of a naive bride is Mrs. Kenneth Knighton (who really knows better), daughter of Mrs. Lola Payne of Eagle Rock. The former Wilhelmina Smith, Mrs. Knighton will	continue studies at Hollywood High while husband Ken plays football for LACC this Fall. The groom is the son of Mrs. Lilie Knighton of Hollywood and Percy Knighton of Little Rock, Ark. (Citizen-News photo).

From this we can see, which I had not been aware of, that her mother had left John Ruggio and was now "maybe" married to Joseph Payne, a butcher from Kansas. In the 1950 Census, Lola Ruggio appears with Joseph Payne as a lodger and working as a telephone operator at a hospital. For some reason, that census is poorly transcribed so it takes some looking to find. This also gave me some clues about Ken which opened up some very interesting stories. Pardon my digression, but sometime you discover these stories that are too good to pass up.

I started looking into Ken's background and as you saw above, his parents were divorced with his mom in LA and his father in Arkansas. His father turned out to be quite an interesting person. He was from Virginia and enlisted in the Army during WW1 and rose to the rank of Sgt Major in Army Intelligence. The in 1919 when he was 20, this happened: *SECRET UNION HAPPY SEQUEL. Divorced Wife of Interned Hun Weds Officer. Ceremony Hastily Decided on During Night Trip. Romance Recalls Famous San Diego Divorce Case. The secret marriage last Saturday night of Mrs. Eunice James of San Diego, divorced wife of Karl Offer, a German now interned, and Sgt. Maj. Percy W. Knighton of the United States Intelligence Service, was made known yesterday, adding another sequel to the remarkable James-Offer case, this time a happy one. The marriage took place a Santa Ana. While Mrs. James, her mother, Mrs. Zulleka James,*

Mrs. Emily Saville of this city, and Sgt.Maj. Knighton were on their way here from San Diego, the pair suddenly determined to marry and a license was secured and the marriage performed that evening at 10 o'clock. They then drove here spent the week-end in this city, and returned to San Diego Monday.

The bride figured in a sensational divorce suit over a year ago when she sought a divorce from her husband, Karl Offer, known as Capt. Offer. Suit for the divorce was filed the day after Offer had been arrested by Federal authorities suspected of actions inimical to the government. When arrested he and his wife had been separated for two weeks.

DIVORCES OFFER. Offer was taken Fort Douglas, Utah, and interned, and, after months in consideration of technical questions of international law, Mrs. Offer was given a decree of divorce. When she received her final decree, she took her maiden name. The decree was granted on ground of extreme cruelty, but the question was brought up that by her marriage she became an alien and so could not sue for divorce at that time.

THREE TIMES MARRIED. While engaged in working with government officials concerning her husband's case Mrs. Offer became acquainted with Sgt.Maj. Knighton, and soon the pair were seen much together. He was formerly with the Twenty-first Infantry, and came here from Charlotte, Va., his home.

Mrs. James, formerly a prominent club woman, came here from Washington, D. C. She is descended from the Gov. Bradford family of Massachusetts, and is a member of the Mayflower Society, the Colonial Dames, the Daughters of the Revolution and other organizations.

To conceal her identity for a time the bride's name was given in the marriage license record as Sanford E. James; her age is 29, and that of the groom 27. Mrs. James has been married twice before.

I resisted the lure of following Eunice, but she sounds like a live wire. She and Percy appear together in the 1920 Census in San Diego where Percy had left the Army and was managing a syrup factory. He was with Eunice who was 17 years older along with Eunice's widowed mother. The lure of Hollywood then caught Percy's attention and he began acting and made it to the movies in the silent era with a role in the William S. Hart movie, "The Border Wireless" about German spies on the Mexican Border which may have been a scenario that he had experience with while in the Army. You can read about it here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Border_Wireless

Apparently, the love affair with Eunice did not last and 1930 found him married to Lily Knighton who turns out to have been Lily Mathews, a young lady from Arkansas who had married Henry Buhler in 1918, had a daughter, Rosemary, in Fort Worth. I'm not sure what happened to Henry, but in 1920, she was divorced and back in her parent's home in Beaumont, TX with her year-old daughter. I don't how she got from Beaumont to Hollywood in the 1920's, but she somehow did and in about 1928 she and Percy Knighton married and had a son, Ken. Not long after their marriage, this happened:

KIDNAP FEARS FELT AS TOT VANISHES - Mother Father Frantic Over disappearance of child age 2.

A kidnaping scare gripped a Hollywood neighborhood today when 2-year-old Kenneth Knighton mysteriously vanished from a baby buggy in front of 5523 Lexington Ave. The mother Mrs. June Knighton told police that she had stepped inside the lobby of the apartment at that address for two minutes to see if she had any mail and when she returned from the building, she discovered the baby gone from his carriage.



"Mama, come and get me," said KENNETH KNIGHTON, 2½ years old, missing for five hours yesterday, late his play telephone. The parents, Mr. and Mrs. Percy W. Knighton, neighbors and police, fearing a possible kidnaping, were scouring the neighborhood in a frenzied search. (Times-Herald photo.)

Mrs. Knighton and her husband Percy W Knighton, a film writer had a dispute last night and had spent the night apart according to Detective Lt Joseph Ewerson. The father came to the Lexington Apt when called and like the mother was frantic over the disappearance of little Kenneth.

Radio cars and detectives scoured the district but found no trace of the child. Likewise, they were unable to locate anyone who had seen the baby either taken from or leave the carriage.

The Knighton residence has been at 1324 North Gower St, but Mrs. Knighton spent the night with friends and made arrangements to rent an apartment at the Lexington Ave address according to the police.

A description of the missing child was over the police teletype and a citywide search was underway this afternoon.

Things are not looking too good for Percy's 2nd marriage. Happily, little Kenneth was found 5 hours later sitting on the curb with his play telephone trying to call his Moma.

To finish Percy's story, in 1939, he married Lucy King, another woman that was 13 years older than Percy. She was from Missouri and while I haven't totally traced her history, she had at least three other marriages. They were together in Hollywood in 1940 where Percy was a freelance screenwriter. In 1942, at the age of 44, he enlisted once again in the Army. I haven't found records of his service, but my suspicion is he probably served as a writer for wartime films for the Department of Defense. He was discharged in 1944, and Lucy must not have appreciated his leaving, because in 1943, he was marrying a 3rd time to Ella May Perimeter in Arkansas. She was the same age as Percy for once. They divorced in 1960. Per his obituary, after the war, he went back to school at Arkansas State Teacher's College and at age 54 got a teaching degree and taught high school in Arkansas. He died in 1971 and was married yet again to Mary Wilcoxson Knighton who I have not researched. Pardon the side trip, but I found this interesting. Percy had a brief mention in the IMDB.

Back to see what I can discover about Wilhemina and Ken. I'm afraid that is going to be as sparse as I feared. Looking at their marriage record in 1949, Ken lived at 5920 Melrose and was 18 and working as a stock clerk. Wilhemina's address looks like 4845 Rusca, but it's unclear. He was a student. They were married at The First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood by the minister whose name is not legible. It's a lovely looking church that is still there.



In an effort to find out more about them, I looked at Ken's stepsister, Rosemary. She seems to have gotten into a bit of acting in the 1940's and she got married about a year after Ken even though she was 12 years older. Her husband was Maurice Calder (born Cohn) whose parents were a Russian father and an English mother. For some reason he changed his name. Maybe people thought that he was related to the notorious Roy Cohn. Rosemary used her birth name Buhler as well as Knighton. As I started looking into her more closely, it spawned another interesting side trip. She was a candidate for Miss California in 1941. She got into the movies and was in a movie in 1948 starring Eddie Cantor called "If You Knew Susie"



and is credited in two more films in 1951 called "Two Tickets to Broadway" and "Tomorrow is Another Day" albeit in minor roles. In 1946, she was featured in an article about the importance of actress's wardrobes along with Lucille Ball. Here she is modeling Russian hats. Perhaps that is how she met her husband.

It looks like she may have become an artist after her marriage and film career and this painting may be one of hers. Her husband, Maurice started a theatrical agency and she had two sons in 1956 and 1958. She had a son named Cam so it probably is.



"Cam," a painting by Rosemary Calder, is one of the winning Santa Paula Art Show paintings purchased over the years and hanging in City Hall.

★ ★ ★
 8:30-9:30 (CBS) (Channel 12) — Hawaii Five-O, its cast of regulars intact, returns for its fourth season with a well-done mystery involving a 10-year-old killing. A pair of skeletons is found in an archaeological dig and, through good detective work, our gang identifies them. But not before a doctor is killed and Jack Lord, as McGarrett, has become involved with an industrialist (played by British actor Herbert Lom), and his beautiful daughter, France Nuyen. A painting plays an important part in this script. It represents the mother of Miss Nuyen's character. It was painted by **Rosemary Calder**, from portraits, in three days and shipped to Hawaii while still wet — it was needed in that much of a rush. (Season Premiere)

From 1971

Sorry for getting off on all of these side trips! Getting back to Wilhemina and Ken, as expected, I have run into a lack of information. I thought I was making hay, when I ran across a whole series of articles about a Ken Knighton who was a big contractor and developer in Shasta and Redding, but the stories about him continued after Ken's death in 1999, so luck there.

My last attempt was to look at everyone's obituaries and to look for children. I have not found any obituaries yet, but I did find two

daughters with last names of Knighton and a mother named Smith born in 1950 and 1953 which are more than likely theirs. California birth records simply list the child's name and the mother's last name, so it is not possible with a 100% degree of certainty to confirm without some other confirming data like a birth announcement in the paper.

Children of Wilhemina and Ken Knighton

370	Billie Jeanne Knighton	1950	Wilhelmina and Kenneth's child#1
371	Susan Willeyjo Knighton	1953	Wilhelmina and Kenneth's child#2

370. Billie Jeanne Knighton 5 MAY 1950 • Los Angeles, CA - Living



The first child born to Ken and Wilhemina was Billie Jeanne who seems to have gone by Jeannie. She graduated from Westchester HS in LA in 1968 and her senior credits are shown.

JEANNIE KNIGHTON A Cappella Choir: 4 semesters, Shereens: LGS: G.A.A.: Senate: Pep Club: Spanish Club

I found her in 1997 in Santa Rosa, CA going under the name of Jeannie B. Knighton-Adams forming a church called the New Hope Metropolitan Community Church. Currently, there is a Masonic Lodge at the address of the church in 2001. A Google search of her name seems to indicate that she currently lives in Eagle Point, OR.

371. Susan Wileyjo Knighton 26 AUG 1953 • Los Angeles, CA - Living



The 2nd child born to Wilhemina and Ken was Sue Knighton who arrived in 1953. I found her in the Westchester HS yearbook as a junior in 1969, but she was not in the 1970 Yearbook so perhaps her parents moved.

On FamilySearch, records indicate that she had an unnamed daughter on 21 August 1969 that died a day later. Maybe that is why she was not in the yearbook.

Records seem to indicate that she married Joseph Cavallo in Feb 1970 which suggests that maybe she did not graduate. They divorced a year later and then in 1973, she married Davis Hensley who seems to have been a classmate of her sister at Westchester in 1968. They divorced in May 1976 and no further information had been found.

Child of Susan Knighton and unknown father

Baby Girl Knighton	1969	1969	Child of Susan Knighton and unknown father
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This completes Wilhemina and Ken Knighton. It was completed on 14 Mar 2025.

134. Don Robert Smith 27 AUG 1933 • Los Angeles, CA - 11 DEC 2003 • Lucerne, CA

That is about the extent of the information that I have about Don. He appears in the 1940 Census as the stepson of John Ruggio after his mother's 2nd marriage and then he disappears until his death notice in 2003. I suspect that he may have enlisted in the service. I checked military records and there were a lot of Don R. Smith's with records from Korea including a couple that were POWs, but nothing that I could

hang my hat on. There were no suggestions for marriages and nothing in the newspapers. His SSID has his name as both Donald R. Smith and Donald R. Ruggio so I don't know if he took his stepfather's name.

135. Walter Paul Smith 21 MAY 1948 Tonopah, Nevada – Living
 Frances Kathleen Driscoll Myers 14 NOV 1949 • Alameda, CA – Living
 Marriage: 16 Oct 1976 • Norfolk, VA

I have a little more information on Walter, but not much. As you may recall, Walter was Jesse's son with his last wife, Sylvia McBride who had previously been married to Lester Myers and had a daughter Olla, who was 21 years older than Walter when he was born. Walter appears with Jesse, Sylvia, Olla and a 70-year-old lodger named Paul Erwin in Tonopah, NV in 1950. Tonopah's nickname is "The Queen of Silver Camps." No occupations are listed for any of them. His father was 52, his mother 42, and he had a 22-year-old step sister. I seriously doubt if he had any interaction with Wilhemina or Don who were 16 and 15 years older and in another state.

After that, the only firm information that I have is a wedding record from Virginia in which was his 2nd marriage. He married Frances Driscoll who had been previously married to Charles Myer from 1973-1976. I have not found Walter's first wife. Walt was 28 and Frances 26 and Walter was in the Navy serving aboard the USS Walter M. Wood DD715. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_William_M._Wood_\(DD-715\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_William_M._Wood_(DD-715)) Here is a link to the history of that ship. It was interesting to note that it was removed from service



three months after Walter's marriage to Frances and later used as a target for training in 1983. Here she is going down.

About the only other information I can add is that Frances's parents were William B. And Mary Forsyth Driscoll from California and Montana. In 1950, William was 30 and a grade school teacher in Oakland, CA and she had a brother Steven J. who was a couple of

years older and apparently a couple of younger brothers. She and Walter do not seem to have stayed married as she is identified as F. Kathleen Keeney in her parents' obituaries. With that being said, I'm going to take a quick look at the other step and half siblings to see what other clues surface. Minor update: On the marriage application in 1976, he indicated that he had completed 4 years of college. I have been unable to find him in any yearbooks, but my suspicions are that he probably graduated from high school about 1966 and probably in California and then headed to college. He may have married while in college, or shortly after graduation and then joined the Navy in the Vietnam Era.

I checked all of the other siblings without adding any information.