

My Story

By Rick Ales

Chapter 1 Grandpa Builds Grand River Manor

I don't remember being born, and I don't remember coming home from the hospital, but I do vividly remember being bathed in the kitchen sink and hearing Porky Pig's "Bebada... bebada...bebada... that all folks!" Must have been about 1954 or 55, me, mom and dad lived in a back cottage on my Grandpa's Grand River Manor property.

My Grandpa, Andrew Aleshauskas and his wife Pearl immigrated to the US from Lithuania in 1917 to escape the Russian Bolshevik revolution. Two things about Grandpa, he hated communists and he became a bootlegger in Cleveland during prohibition. Mom said he owned a speakeasy in Euclid and had a speed boat to run across Lake Eire to get booze and bathtub gin from Canada. Two of his lady friends, who I had met later met later in their lives, must have kept Grandpa on his toes in the 20's and 30's. Ruby Dee was a burlesque queen and stripper at the Roxy Theater downtown Cleveland and Mrs. Burns was some gangster's gun moll who absolutely hated Elliot Ness, I think he stood her up one time or something, when he was a cop in Cleveland – long before his Untouchable days in Chicago. I remember Mrs. Burns sitting at the bar in the Manor telling stories of her house in Wickliffe being tommy gunned by drive-by gangsters back in the day. But I'm jumping ahead.

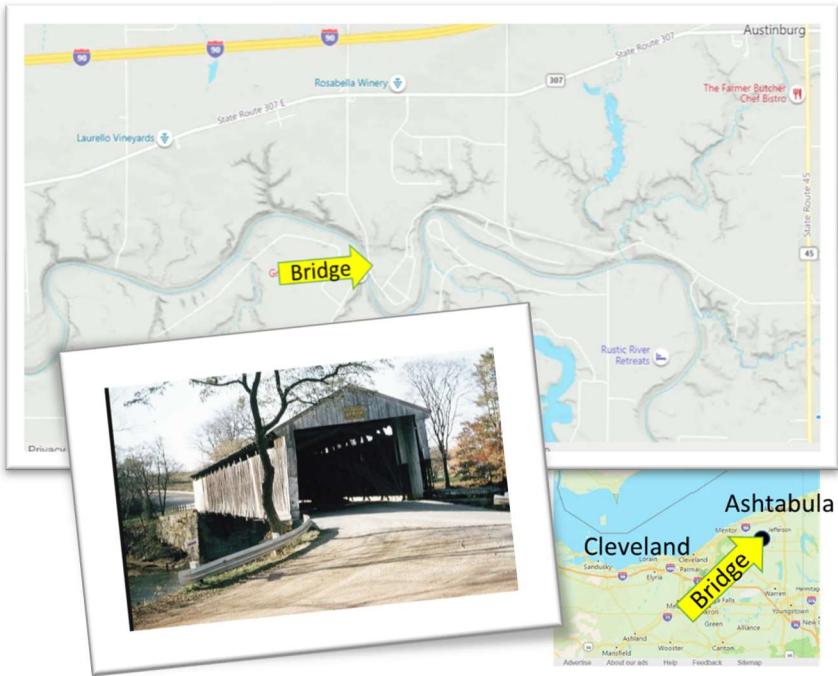
After my aunt Ruth and my dad, Richard Cornelius came along and the 21st Amendment ended prohibition in 1933, Grandpa became a respectable tavern proprietor and prominent business leader in Euclid. Mom told me, because of Grandpa's bootlegging booty, even though my dad was a devout Catholic and Altar Boy, he was a wild child. He always had the latest, fastest cars and always chased even faster women. He loved to polka and by the time he was like, fifteen, he was playing accordion and singing in Grandpa's tavern. Dad's best friend, Richard Jalenowski who Americanized his name to become Dick Jay was madly in love with my aunt Ruth. Mom says Ruth and Dad were also very close so that's why when she was killed in an accident, Dad and Dick Jay tried to drown their sorrow in a bottle every weekend for the rest of their lives. I'm sure we grew up calling Dick Jay, Uncle Dick as some sort of recognition or tribute to his love for our Aunt Ruth. About the same time Ruth was killed, Grandma Pearl was diagnosed with diabetes. Then it got worse...

Just after WW2, Grandpa run afoul of some of the organizers in big labor dispute and fearing for their lives, packed up his family, abandoned his business and fled Euclid in the middle of the night, landing in rural Ashtabula County. He laid low until Mrs. Burns told him the heat was off and, "Oh by the way," she knew of a nice property near her summer cottage. Well Grandpa bought that piece of property, a rundown general store that sat on the west bank of the Grand River, right next to the north side of the Mechanicsville covered bridge. Mechanicsville is a minor subdivision in Austinburg Township, about 2 miles from the center of Austinburg, population about 250 back then and about 5 miles from the village

of Geneva. In its hay day the General Store's main customers were workers at the Mechanicsville Mill back in the 1800's. With Mill long gone, I think the store was just selling a few essentials like milk, bread, and ice cream when Grandpa bought it. The property had a huge red barn with a hay loft, a few orchard-style apple and pear trees, a half dozen grape vines, and some elderberry, blackberry, and raspberry bushes. There were also 5 or maybe 6 summer cottages on that 10-acre property, 5 of those acres were wooded.

Looking at a map, Grand River could have been named Crooked River had the Cuyahoga not already laid claim to that moniker. The homes on the winding roads along either riverbank were about a 50-50 mix

of year- round residents (would you call these people living in Mechanicsville "Mechanics?") and the other half being summer vacation cottages of mostly Clevelanders and other city folks. Up-river from the bridge are rapids and beyond that, the deep-water reserve. Down river is a series of holes and shallows all the way to the Harpersfield dam. I had once read in Farmer's Almanac that that spot, from the rapids above the bridge down to the next river's bend was some of



the best muskellunge fishing in the United States. Away from the river is corn, summer wheat and grape farmland. When I was a kid, the grapes were mostly concord jelly and juice grapes sold to Welsch's. A kid could make 15 cents a bushel picking grapes in the fall. Now the area is the much more lucrative, Grand River Wine Valley! It's simply a gorgeous area for county living and wonderful place to get away from the city's hustle and bustle.

So, Grandpa decided Mechanicsville could use a night club.

In 1947, Grandpa encased that old dilapidated 3-bedroom house, with the general store in the front room, in red brick and added a Tavern with a huge horseshoe bar along with a dining and dancing hall all decorated with slate tile floors, dark wormy chestnut wainscoting that at about eye level, gave way to skip trowel plaster upper walls and ceilings. All very elegant! He also put in a modern kitchen with a white oak floor, two deep fat friers, huge floor to ceiling 4-door ice box, a gas cook stove, meat slicers,

deep stainless-steel sinks, and generous butch-block food prep stations. The kitchen also had a dumbwaiter that ran down to his new basement under his upstairs additions. Now in his new basement, he put in a modern oil burning central furnace to eliminate the pot-belly coal stoves and a huge workshop complete with a shower, an ice making freezer and walking cooler for the kegs that piped their cold draft beer to the upstairs bar. He also added a second bar downstairs served by the

dumbwaiter. You got to the downstairs bar either from an outside entry well facing the river or from the stairs just past the door that led to the old general store from the upstairs bar. Now the downstairs bar had a totally different feel, with knotty pine paneling, bare concrete floor, deer and musky heads staring at you from behind the bar. And there was a skee ball machine. Grandpa figured upstairs would serve the upscale, sophisticated, city vacationers from Cleveland and the farmers with their muddy boots could drink their beer just fine on the bare concrete floor downstairs. And the store, Grandpa kept a small cooler for milk and freezer for ice cream, some bread, cereal and what-not, mostly so he didn't have to run to Geneva if we ran out of milk. He sat these humongous rubber plants on the front window counter, filling the huge plate glass window with a green backdrop for the pink neon signs proclaiming OPEN and LIQUOR. The plants also propped up the hand-drawn posters announcing, "Dick Ales – **NOW** appearing FRI & SAT NITE." The Store became the liquor and beer storeroom and Grandma Pearl's office where she kept the books using a then modern mechanical adding machine with about a thousand buttons and a hand crank.

Dad, a senior at Austinburg High School, had some sort of a roadster, and took up residence in one of Grandpa's cottage. Uncle Dick later told me they had some pretty wild parties back in those days. I never knew how Dad met Mom but would bet you dollars to doughnuts, it wasn't at a wild party. They were married shortly after Mom graduated from Geneva High School in 1950 when she was working as an operator for the Geneva Telephone Company. With the Korean conflict underway, Dad joined the Navy and hauled Mom to Virginia Beach. Mom found work as a secretary for the FBI, a job that she said she loved. After a year of Naval service, Dad receive a hardship discharge when grandma's diabetes worsened causing her to have her legs amputated. So, Dad and Mom left Virginial Beach and moved into Grandpa's finest cottage, then I came along.

Wait, wait, wait! You skipped how did Richard Cornelius Aleshauskas become Dick Ales?

The story goes, Grandpa didn't read or write English, so when the beer man wanted him to sign for the delivery, Grandpa picked up a bottle of Duquesne Ale (Duke Ale to Clevelanders) he said, "Dis my name," and signed D. Ales. Well now I'm pretty sure he just Americanize his name by dropping the last 7 letters which was common practice among east European immigrants, but I still like the Duke story.



So, there I am, listening to Porky Pig while getting bathed in the sink. What else do I remember? Lying on the couch with Mom and Dad watching Wyatt Erp on 12-inch, black and white TV. I remember sitting in the screened in porch on a warm summer night listing to crickets chirping and the bull frogs try to attract a mate. I remember riding on Dad's back during his nightly swing across Grand River after dinner. When I was a little older, maybe 3 or 4, I distinctly remember more than once, walking up to Assumption church holding Mom's hand and her catching wolf whistles from the passing Greyhound busses; she was a very attractive woman, even befitting a Dick Ales. She helped Grandma Pearl manage the Manor and naturally became the day barmaid and the head waitress at night. With mom and dad both working nights for Grandpa at the Manor, when I wasn't staying with Mom's mom, my Grandma Pluma, I had a babysitter. One babysitter in particular, I remember her screaming at our 12-inch, black and white TV the night Elvis was on Ed Sullivan, (same thing happened a few years later when the Beatles were on.)

I remember Dad bowling 3 or 4 nights a week and having what seemed like 40 or 50 colorful silk bowling shirts, one I remember was bright pink with Green Script on the back leaving no doubt that this was Dick Ales bowling for Girard Nursery. On most bowling nights I did get to go to Grandma Pluma's house, which was right next to the Norfolk and Western tracks on Woodlawn street in the north end of Geneva. So close to the tracks in fact, trains going by would shake the whole house and make the glasses dance on Grandma's kitchen shelves. I loved trains.

I also remember the Christmas I got in big trouble for getting into my presents in the middle of the night. I remember my little sister Mickey – Michele Ann –when she came home. That was 1955. The four of us lived the good life in a cozy cottage with a 5-acres of woods and covered bridge for a playground and combination swimming and fishing hole right out our front door. Life was great. End of Chapter 1.

Grandpa always got up about six am to clean up, sweeping, mopping, washing dishes, taking deliveries and everything else to the manor ready for business the of the coming day. He'd open the bar about 10 to server his first customer almost always Bill Mulharane. Dad would relieve Grandpa about noon so Grandpa could take a nap when he'd finished his chores. Dad as the day bartender, practiced his accordion and singing while he'd often let the regulars get their own beer if the bar wasn't too busy. Grandpa was always up in time to watch Huntley Brinkley Report before Grandma served supper in the big kitchen. Grandpa's evening shift began right after supper.

Grandpa, Andy Ales, was a stout man standing about 6'1" close cropped pure white hair around his usually shinny chrome dome. He had pure white walrus mustache and wore orange turtle shell classed, black pants, white full-length apron with strings that wrapped around I don't know how many times but always tied with a bow in the front. He wore a white shirt with it's long sleeves held up by colorful, mostly red garters, all topped of with a black bow tie. He was the quintessential classic bartender with a heavy Lithuanian accent. During the weeknights Dad might cook, or help Grandpa if he got busy, but mostly sat around, shooting the breeze with the customers after he got back from bowling.

But on Friday and Saturday night he was Dick Ales APPEARING TONIGHT!