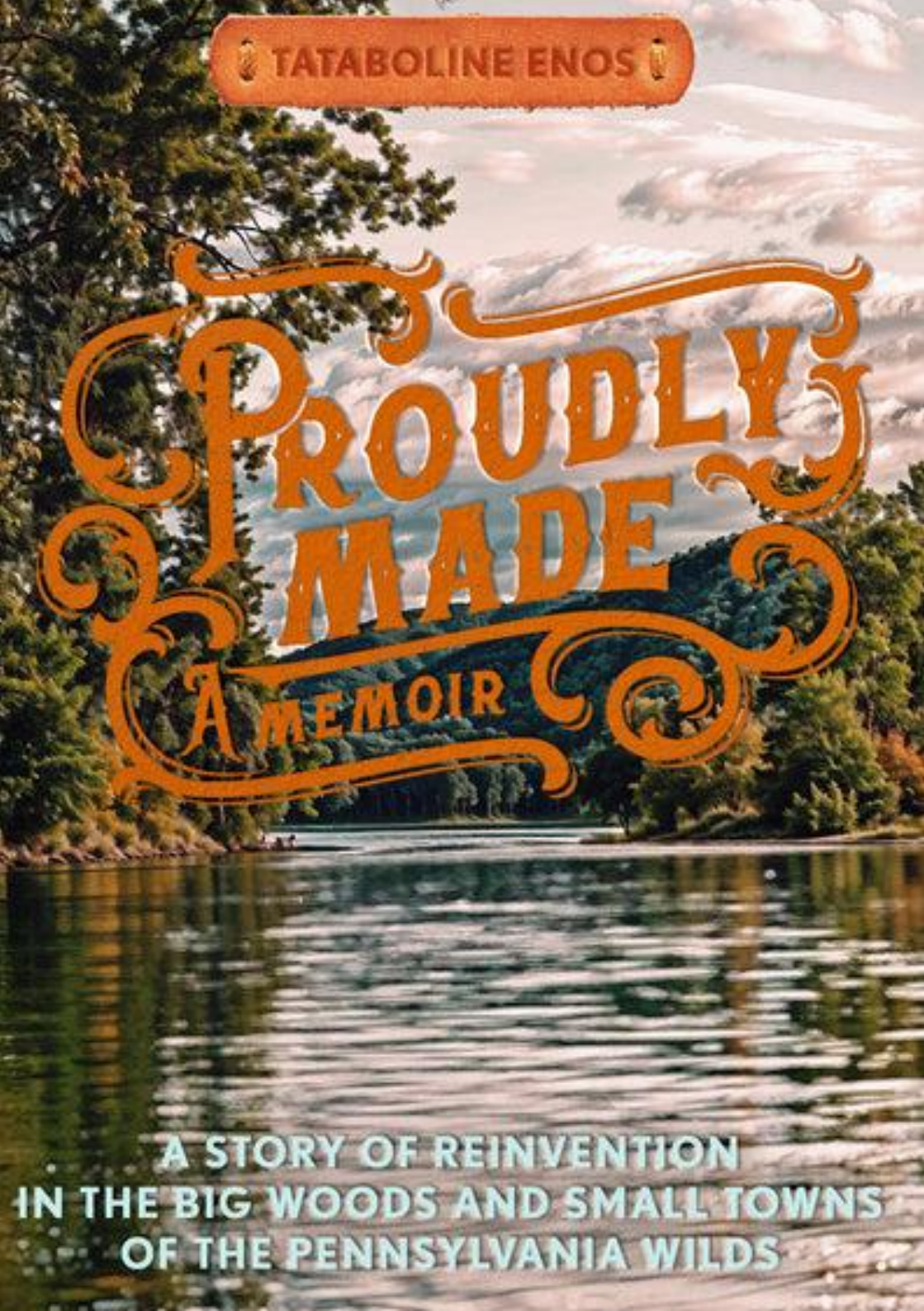

TATABOLINE ENOS
PROUDLY MADE
A MEMOIR
A STORY OF REINVENTION
IN THE BIG WOODS AND SMALL TOWNS
OF THE PENNSYLVANIA WILDS

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From what I could piece together, my grandparents had very difficult upbringings. Both of their dads were violent alcoholics, and Grandma was beaten and molested by her dad. Grumpy's dad also beat him, but his mom, Mary Brant, was by all accounts a saint who, through her kindness, left a huge impression on everyone.

My grandparents got married at a young age to escape their situations. According to news clippings Piper found, Grumpy, whose real name was Ashley Brant, enlisted in the military during World War II. He was sent to North Africa in 1943 and transferred to Italy in 1944, serving with the medical corps of the 85th Infantry Division, Fifth Army. He spent months in theater, and at one point, was a prisoner of war.

Grumpy's older brother, Charles Norman Brant, was also in the war. The brothers were stationed near each other but didn't realize it until one day they ran into each other on the ravished landscape. Charles wrote home to his mom about it, and the tale made it into Warren's local paper. Piper unearthed the article through an ancestry search site while helping Pugsa's daughter with a family history paper

she was writing for school. Charles told his mother that on Valentine's Day, "a very dirty American soldier, with long beard and long hair," walked up to him and started teasing him. "The visitor turned out to be Cpl. Brant's brother," the news article said. "They both write how happy they were to meet and that they are stationed about fifty miles apart."

Piper and I couldn't believe it when she turned up this artifact. It felt so special to get this glimpse into Grumpy's life as a young man. I could just imagine their reunion. Before I had kids, I felt like I spent most of my time trying to reunite with my sisters. Our first careers kept each of us on the move to far-flung places. Sandoz a travel nurse, Piper in the Navy, me reporting. Money was always tight, so when we did manage to get in a room together, it was a joyous occasion that felt nothing short of a miracle.

Piper sent me the article about Grumpy via text. I reread it several times and then called her on the phone. Piper had been stationed in Italy, on the island of Sicily, when she was in the Navy, and I lived with her there for a few months, early in my journalism career, after I ran out of money in South Africa, trying to make it as a freelancer. Grumpy never talked to us about the war when we lived with him as kids, but he did tell us about the beautiful Sistine Chapel he'd seen while stationed overseas. Piper and I wanted to see it as a way to honor his memory. Both broke, Piper finagled us a free bus ride to Rome by signing up to

run the Rome marathon under the team banner of her base, Naval Air Station Sigonella.

These experiences swirled with my memories of Grumpy and my own experiences of seeing my siblings after long stretches apart, and I began to cry.

It had been a long time since I'd thought about Grumpy in such detail. We had lived with him and Grandma for a while after my parents split. He had been a defining male figure in my life, influencing my creativity, my love of nature, and my sense of self-worth and belonging. He even inspired the creation of my name. My mom said he used to pat her lovingly on the head as a girl and say, "Ta Ta." I thought of the only picture I'd seen of Grumpy as a young man, smiling and playing near a crick in Warren, and envisioned him on foreign soil in a tattered war uniform giving his brother a huge hug.

"Can you imagine finding each other like that?" I said to Piper.

"I know," she said, "his big brother!"

Charles did not make it home from the war. He was buried at a cemetery in France. His mother, my great-grandmother, was notified by telegram. As for my grandfather, a newspaper clipping said he returned with "two bronze stars on his campaign ribbons for major engagements in which he participated, the Good Conduct Medal and the Bronze Star for meritorious performance in

combat against the enemy." But inside, my uncles said, my grandfather struggled deeply with what he had experienced.

When he got back to Warren, my grandfather got a job with an oil company, and he and my grandma moved into a house the company owned on an oil lease in Sugar Run. My uncle Terry had been born shortly after his dad had shipped out for war and was now a young boy. Two more boys soon followed. The first was named Charles, after the brother my grandfather lost in the war, and the second, Frank.

Warren County was not far from where America's first oil well had been discovered, and drilling for oil was now a major industry. "Every place was loaded with oil wells back then," Terry said. "We called them 'the guns.' You'd hear them. Boom! Boom! Boom!"

Like a lot of young men working in extractive industries in those days, to keep a roof over their heads, my grandfather did dangerous, laborious work and didn't get paid much for it.

"We ate a lot of deer meat and a lot of groundhogs," my uncle Terry said.

Mom had a small framed black and white picture of my uncles when they were young displayed in her living room. Their stories fresh in my mind, I picked it up one day and looked at it anew. Charles and Frank look about seven or eight and are standing in front of what appears to be a

sawmill, their dad working in the background. Their pants and coats are tattered and far too small, their faces dirty.

People in rural Pennsylvania didn't talk about being part of Appalachia very often, despite how the Appalachian Mountains shaped the physical and cultural landscape, creating economic hardships but also cultivating resilience and creativity in communities and often, a love for the outdoors. But looking at this picture now, all I could think was, *My family is from northern Appalachia.* And I was proud of that.