

# Among

## THE BLAND FAMILY NEWSLETTER

# Cousins



Volume 2, Number 2

May 1984-November 1984

Dear Cousins:

This is the fourth number of "Among Cousins." As usual, genealogically this issue will introduce significant new information, answer some questions and raise others. I should first explain why the Newsletter is approximately one month late. The most significant cause of delay for me was the sudden death of my father on March 17, 1984, which left me indisposed for awhile. Also, I had to confront some demanding pressure from my work that delayed work on this issue. I hope you all will understand.

STEPHEN BOYD (TEX) BLAND, 1960-1983

All of us who have done research on our ancestors have surely found some who died in military combat. The National Archives are full of Blands who died on one or another war. We also know of instances in which we are unable to place any flesh and bones life upon these individuals. With that in mind, I have pursued the story of Stephen Bland since last October when I learned that he had been killed in action. Yet I could not have written the story without the contributions made by Rose Virginia

AMONG COUSINS - THE BLAND FAMILY  
NEWSLETTER Mailing Address:

Charles L. Bland  
Publisher and Editor  
154 Delamere Road  
Williamsville, New York 14221  
(716) 631-3193

AMONG COUSINS - THE BLAND FAMILY NEWSLETTER is an organic extension of the research that was brought together in Charles Bland's A Vision of Unity: The Bland Family in England and America (1982). Although I am the author of A Vision of Unity, I am far from being its sole creator. Rather, the information in the book is the product of shared research by many interested persons who have continued to conduct research and to share their findings, through the Newsletter, with an ever expanding audience of readers and other researchers. It is my hope that "Among Cousins" will continue to be the vehicle that enables expansion of our collective knowledge about the Bland family, and that all subscribers will join the enterprise in this spirit.

As editor, I assume all responsibility for printing, sale and timely distribution of the Newsletter. I will publish all material received without consciously altering the contributor's intent, but I reserve the right to comment upon any information received.

Charles L. Bland

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Watkins Bland, Stephen's mother and the unsparing efforts of Lenore Bland Brown of Fort Worth, Texas, who spoke to Mrs. Bland, collected much of the story that follows and sent me key newspaper clippings, including the story in the October 27, 1983 Fort Worth Star-Telegram that appeared as Attachment 14 (AC 2-1). I am also grateful to Marjorie Hartis of Lancaster, Texas for the news clippings she sent me, and especially to Lenora Brown of Eden, New York who by a dint of luck somewhat complicated to explain, retrieved the notes on Stephen's story that I had lost and returned them to me through Mrs. Brown of Fort Worth, Texas.

Stephen Boyd Bland was born in Denton, Texas on February 6, 1960, the son of Johnny James Bland (1918-1975) and Rosa Virginia Watkins Bland (1917- ), who moved to Texas in 1951 after living in Oktibbera and Webster County, Mississippi. Johnny James Bland was the son of Frank Martin Bland and Maude Frances Crowley of Mississippi and the grandson of John and Elizabeth Bland of Pheba, Mississippi. I have been unable to find the connecting link between this eldest John Bland and any of the family for which we have research. In Mississippi, Johnny James Bland had been a farmer. When the family moved to Denton, Texas he became a plumber. The family moved to Arlington, Texas in 1964 and Stephen attended Nichols Junior High there. During Stephen's high school years, the family moved to Mathison, Mississippi and Stephen graduated from the Mathison High School, where he lettered in football and baseball.

Following his graduation from high school, Stephen enrolled at Clarke College, Mississippi, where he played baseball. Little is said about Stephen's time at Clarke College. Following his death, the college granted Stephen an honorary degree in the humanities. The record as I have it is silent regarding the years 1979-1981. In January 1981, Stephen joined the National Guard. Unable to find work, he enlisted in the U.S. Marines in March 1981, where he seemed to find his niche. During his Marine career, Stephen, who came to be known as "Tex" earned the rank of Lance Corporal. His mother commented that "he went into the Marines a boy and came out of Basic Training a man. He was a Marine through and through." His Congressman, Tom Vandergriff, (D., Texas), similarly called Stephen a "Marine's Marine." Here I must interject that although I do not subscribe to the notion of a family physical resemblances, "Tex" is, in both pictures I have seen of him, the twin image of my first cousin Carl Thomas Bland (1932-1964), also a marine. Stephen was assigned to the 24th MAU, Detachment M; Battalion 1/8 WBNS Company, 81st Platoon. Although information is not clear, Stephen apparently was stationed at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, where he met Ruthanne Hamilton and married her on January 15, 1983.



STEPHEN BLAND

Stephen was a big husky man, over six feet tall, who, so they say, liked to pick up the front end of Plymouth Dusters (I once had a Duster that I would gladly have had Tex pick up and throw in the river). He was a meat and potatoes man who disliked liver, quiche and Jello (too quivery and shaky, I'll bet). His wife described him as only a woman can, as a man who swung open a bar door one night and strolled in wearing cowboy hat and boots and walked away with her breath, her heart and the whole damned ball of wax. His wife described him as somewhat romantically jealous, overprotective. Long range plans were that after Stephen's discharge the family, including two children of Ruthanne's by a former marriage, would move to some far back rural southern spot, "so far back the mailman wouldn't be able to find us." But the marriage was brief, for in

May, 1983 Stephen Bland shipped out to Lebanon, where he was killed Sunday morning, October 23, 1983 in a terrorist bombing of a marine barracks. For his service and his patriotic sacrifice, Stephen "Tex" Bland was awarded posthumously the Purple Heart, Marine Corps. Expeditionary Medal for Lebanon, the Good Conduct Medal for service between May 1982 and October 1983 and the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon. Stephen's life and service were memorialized by the Mississippi House of Representatives concurrent resolution #26, February 13, 1984. Stephen's mother spoke the universal lament of all parents who have to bury a child: "You don't ever get over losing a child," but took heart from her son's determination. "He always wanted to be the best...He wanted to be patriotic." On October 23, 1983, "Tex" Bland gave his patriotic best.

#### BRUCE STEVEN BLAND, 1922-1984

My father, Bruce Steven Bland, was born June 27, 1922 at Cliffside in Rutherford County, North Carolina. On March 17, 1984, aged 61, he suffered a massive heart attack at his home in Wilson, North Carolina and died before the day was out.

As I made the soulful journey back to North Carolina for Dad's burial, I remembered a very special week during a very special summer, 1979, that I spent alone with Dad. He and I travelled the entire Eastern side of North Carolina that week, from his home in Wilson to Charlotte, to Wilmington and back to Wilson. We visited old relatives, and talked endlessly about our past lives and memories. It was at about this time when the idea of writing what became A Vision of Unity had begun to incubate in my mind. It had occurred to me that many in Dad's generation were dying and taking to the grave with them many precious memories of older generations. It was imperative for me to develop an oral history file of their lives and memories. Much of that week was devoted to taping the thoughts of older relatives and during the process I spent many hours in taping Dad's recollections of his past life. Free from the tempering influence of nearby listeners, Dad was unusually frank and deliberate in what he said. As the sessions wound down, I told Dad that as part of a big historical project I was going to write his biography one day, that I would try to write it honestly and compassionately, striving to avoid false or simplistic impressions, trying never to pass judgement upon a man who had lacked the advantage of hindsight as he lived his life. It was my goal to elicit from the information he had given me the passions, trials, failures, triumphs, growth of a life being lived.

In North Carolina last March there was scant opportunity for such an undertaking, which was inappropriate for the moment anyway. I was immersed in an emotional maelstrom of relatives who for the most part, far from seeking to understand Dad, were determined to enshrine him as a Christian saint. Now Dad was admittedly a Baptist all his life, though a fairly modest Christian. He was widely travelled, had seen a lot of the world and had developed a tolerant, cosmopolitan style. He recognized that Christian piety and the best values of Christianity were not the sole monopoly of the Baptist faith and realized, I think, that the well-fed faces who appeared at church on Sunday morning in their sartorial splendor were not the only adherents to piety and good works. Certainly,

1. In many ways, the impetus to write A Vision of Unity derived from Dad, who was anxious for me to take up the work his brother Berry had begun. Dad was always a fervent supporter of the project, giving both his emotional and financial support.
2. Cf, VU, pp. 563-585, esp. 579-581. The first printing of VU (March 1982) contained a lengthy final chapter about the descendants of my great grandparents, Berry Elsey Bland and Martha Greene Bland. This chapter was truncated for all later editions.

he never forgot Christ's admonition in Matthew 6: 5-7. Luckily, in all this emotional melee - undoubtedly I was a participant - I found a calm and rational person, an engaging young Baptist minister who sat down with me, with the family, to gather anecdotes about Dad. He seemed to realize that sainthood did not suit Dad very well, and in his eulogy that followed, he wove the information given him into a very forthright and generous eulogy. Yet eulogy it was. The minister purposed to inter Dad, not to understand him. So I shall try my hand at this, the story of my father, Bruce Bland, as he lived his life.

Bruce Bland was the youngest of ten children born to Thomas Bunyan Bland and Margaret Delena Kirby. By the time Dad was born, his parents were middle aged, which turned out to be both a liability and a benefit to Dad. All of his children speak of Bunyan with love tinged by fearful respect. A product of his culture, Bunyan could be harsh in his ways. True to his values, Bunyan believed in mutual obligations between parents and children in which the strength and endurance of the family was paramount. These values, enforced by a younger, physically stronger man, laid a different set of imperatives before Bunyan's older children than for Dad. By the time of Dad's halcyon days, he was a Golden Gloves Boxer, aged sixteen or seventeen, young, lean and hard and with a mean streak in him.<sup>3</sup> Bunyan on the other hand, had become stooped with age, had cataracts in his eyes and was hard of hearing. He was physically unable to control Dad as he had the older children. Dad rebelled against what he called Bunyan's "dictatorship." He loved to regale listeners with the story of how when he traded Bunyan's mule for a shotgun, the old man started to whip him. Dad, as he avows, calmly and in a clear voice predicated by an expression of love, told his father that no one was going to take a stick



Bruce Steven Bland, age 16, 1938

3. Dad once saved my life by giving me a direct blood transfusion in a doctor's office. He had just told the doctor that if I died, he would kill the doctor. The old doctor, doing his professional best, saved me in spite of Dad's threat.

to him unless he was a better man. Startled, Bunyan backed down. In other ways also, Dad rebelled, most significantly by marrying my mother.

Then there was education. Some of Dad's older siblings broke away from Bunyan's iron hand by marriage, others by more or less successful attempts at education. Bunyan's daughters in particular were deeply influenced in their educational values by their grandmother, Martha Greene Bland (1849-1935). By the time Dad reached adolescence however, Martha was dead, so my father learned no lessons from his wise grandmother. Significantly, he had no meaningful memories of her. At best, his parents were indifferent to the value of education, and at worst were cruelly hostile to it. This negative attitude must have influenced Dad. He could remember only one teacher that he identified with. Then too, when he was thirteen, Dad's brother John Carroll Bland (1916-1935) died. Carroll's death, emotionally draining, also severed a valuable transportation link between Dad and the school he attended which was about five miles away, because Carroll drove the school bus. At about the same time, Dad had to take on the responsibility of driving Bunyan to and from work because of Bunyan's weakened hearing and eyesight. So there were many negatives that discouraged Dad from seeking further education, and only one positive that, had it been properly nourished, might have turned his life around:

In his own words, Dad had an "insane, unmanageable desire" to fly airplanes. His father took him to an air show near Charlotte, North Carolina when he was a small boy<sup>4</sup> and Dad dates his love of aircraft from that point. Dad spoke wistfully of long ago hot summer days when he could stand in the yard of his farm home and watch an airplane slowly approach, glide overhead, disappear against the far horizon, and dreamed that one day he would fly an airplane. He told Bunyan that he wanted to be a pilot when he grew up. Drolly, Bunyan told Dad that if he'd work hard until he was sixteen, Bunyan would give him the money to learn to fly, a promise that was never kept. Rather, Dad took odd jobs at the small airports in Charlotte and Gastonia when he was 15 or 16. An old pilot took him up for flights around the county and Dad learned to fly that way. He was young and had tasted the wild blue yonder. Intermittently, he worked for one of the New Deal's Alphabet Soup agencies, the CCC, and he was passionately in love with a beautiful young woman, Frances Faires.

It was a critical juncture for Dad and the decisions he made set in train developments over the next decade that haunted him in some ways for the rest of his life. Dad must have reckoned upon the value of an education for as desperately in love as he was with my mother, they had discussed marriage in terms of waiting until they were twenty-one and their educations were complete.<sup>5</sup> At this point, Dad might have drifted away from Mom, and opted for education. But he didn't. Smitten by love, surely not the first, he married my mother on July 8, 1939. I arrived a year later and to support his new family, Dad drifted from the bare wages of the CCC into the local cotton mill, taking a job as a tying machine operator for \$11 per week take home pay. His wings were clipped. He was earthbound! Among his parents and siblings, however, there was always a strong ambivalence about the life of a mill hand. It was well-founded for the numbers

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4. My mother told me that one of my first sentences was "Daddy 'fy' airplane in Texas." Though there was no conscious encouragement to emulation, nothing pleases Dad's grandson, Thomas Eliot Bland, than to go to Buffalo International Airport and watch the jetliners take off and land. Ironically, Tommy's first flight of which he has a memory, was March 18, the day we flew to North Carolina for Dad's funeral.

5. The implications for me are admittedly metaphysical.

of burned out old men and women, lint-haired and mortally afflicted with brown-lung disease, their entire lives consumed by the company, was legend. Dad was determined that it wasn't going to happen to him. At an older brother's insistence, early in 1941 he went to Jackson, Tennessee to learn a carpenter's trade, came home after a few months to work in the mill again, and in June 1942, joined the U.S. Army Aviation Cadets. What slight advantage he had in knowing the rudiments of flying a small aircraft were swept away by the technological expertise that was demanded of combat pilots. Dad simply could not compete. During the next three years he moved from the Cadets into the Army Glider Corps and became a trained aircraft mechanic, receiving an honorable discharge in December 1945 with the rank of Staff Sergeant. To the frustrations borne of these failures were added the strains caused by long separations from my mother. Though my parents lived together until early 1950, the seeds of dissolution were sewn during the war years and were irreparable. These pressures were funneled into the transient nature of wartime Army life, which embodied a fatalistic kind of hedonistic living. It should not be surprising that during this period, Dad began to drink heavily. The drinking continued for thirty years, compounded by his own somewhat cavalier treatment of the problem, the particular work culture of the automobile business world to which he belonged in the 1950s and 1960s and his ceaseless, unmitigated failure to find peace and happiness in this world. By the 1960s certainly, Dad had become an extremely difficult person to abide and at times he was obnoxious and unpleasant, though these dark threads were always interwoven with a bright thread of being in which he was very charming, understanding and solicitous.

Dad and my mother were divorced July 28, 1952 and on October 19, 1952 Dad married Mary Bolick Downs (1926- ), a young woman who had been raised in bucolic Pender County, North Carolina. Mary persisted with Dad until the end and it should be said of her, as of my mother, that she gave much of her life to a man who was not uniformly easy to live with.

Dad liked to say that he had done well for an old country boy, and he said it in that down home spirit of having started poor as Job's Turkey and made it. Indeed he did, and it was about this time, 1950-1954, that his career star began to rise. Between 1946-1949 Dad had worked as an aircraft mechanic in Charlotte and for pleasure and modest profit he flew small aircraft, including a Steerman Bi-Plane which was the vehicle of my maiden flight. If I am not mistaken, Dad's last flight involved an emergency night landing on a highway near Hickory, North Carolina. Chastened perhaps, Dad gave up flying and started work as a salesman for an automobile parts concern. Between 1952-1954 Dad worked for then Nash Motors as a company representative, travelling the width and breadth of North Carolina. At age 32, Dad was laid off because of the company's reorganization into what is now American Motors. Within the year, he began work as a "District Manager" for The Oldsmobile Division of General Motors. In this capacity he was a company representative to individual dealers, monitoring orders and sales, advising and guiding dealers. Here he found his niche. He worked with Oldsmobile from about 1955-1970 and his success was affirmed by his superiors, who named him "Man of the Year" in 1965, though my tape is unclear regarding the scope of his competition. Economically and materially Dad prospered during these years, but the work, which entailed constant travel, took its toll of him physically and emotionally. He once complained bitterly to me that his life was a series

6. Characteristically, Dad never gave up anything entirely. He kept a commercial pilots license all his life and surprised his son Steven one weekend by taking him for a brief spin in a rented aircraft.

of comings and goings from motels.<sup>7</sup> In 1969-1970 and again in 1975 Dad attempted to break the cycle by going into partnerships for a private automobile dealership, but in both cases he failed. In the first instance, Oldsmobile restored him to his job, but at length Dad got a more lucrative position with Toyota, living in Raleigh, North Carolina and Tampa, Florida. Ultimately, his long experience paid off with a position in the then fledgling company, Subaru Atlantic. In 1976, Subaru examined Dad's credentials and found that his 25 plus years' experience in the automobile business, specifically in North Carolina, with intimate ites to and knowledge of dealerships and personalities in the state, and a reputation for reliability and excellent work, made him just the man for a job. Subaru hired Dad, assigned him North Carolina, and Dad remained on the job for the rest of his life. Dad's experience and work was a key factor in the company's expanded volume in North Carolina. I was indeed pleased to see not only his manager and colleagues from Subaru but friends and associates from all walks of the automobile industry in attendance at his funeral.

Dad's life turned around for twelve bright and shining years, 1971-1983, for him and for those he loved and who loved him. It happened when he acknowledged he was an alcoholic and he stopped drinking.<sup>8</sup> Dad became a much happier, more coherent and purposeful man. It is arguable, for instance, that an unreliable fifty-four year old alcoholic could not have made the new start with Subaru that Dad accomplished in 1976. During this twelve year interlude, 1971-1983, many sweet rewards came Dad's way. His mastery of the bottle transformed him. Had he done nothing else, this triumph of personal growth entitled him on March 17, 1984 to march, in the words of Yeats' poem, "Proud, open-eyed, laughing to the tomb."

Certainly Dad remained difficult at times, perhaps more so for those who lived with him. But, in these years he reclaimed his naturally jocular and laughing good humor,<sup>9</sup> he was understanding, empathetic, conciliatory, gentle, generous and positively outreaching. My younger brother Tom remarked to me that during these years he became acquainted with a friend in Dad that he had never known before. I agree.

I was somewhat truculently slow to grasp Dad's outstretched hand of friendship. I had known too much past pain. He seemed unreceptive, even hostile to my adult experiences which I felt were incomprehensible to him. Two people nudged me toward the realization that Dad wanted to be my friend, to honestly know me better. The first was my good friend and cousin C.B. "Hap" Bland (1909-1981) with whom Dad had reached an uneasy reconciliation in the early 1970s. Most important, however, was my wife Mary Jane Migliore,<sup>10</sup> who saw in my father and impressed upon me his bright qualities, qualities that too often were overlooked by others close to him, including myself.

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7. With characteristic humor, tinged with irony, Dad recalled that during his service years he had bootlegged liquor and cigarettes from a motel. God, he laughed, must have punished him by sentencing him to the life of a traveling salesman. Because of Dad, I have gained an extra measure of Willy Lowman's despair in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman.

8. Those close to Dad hold varying opinions about why he gave up alcohol. Perhaps all our opinions contain a particle of the whole truth, which Dad took with him to the grave.

9. Dad was fond of telling outlandish and hilariously distorted stories. His initials were B.S.

10. On my wedding day, my brother Steve said, "You aren't going to back out are you?" Dad, who had seen me slip through other knots, chuckled and growled, "If he does, I'll kick his ass between his shoulders." I was not one to cross a former Golden Gloves man.

In these last years, Dad and I became good friends. He was, in fact, one of the best I ever had. Through my marriage, Dad was blessed with two grandchildren, Christina Louise (1978- ) and Thomas Eliot (1981- ).<sup>11</sup> As these two beautiful children brought stability and continuity to my life, so too they cemented my friendship with Dad. He enjoyed his grandchildren immensely, with a protean vitality that I never fully comprehended. In these last years, Dad helped me through sometimes unsolicited but always friendly and useful advice, to become a better father and husband and to show more patience and understanding for those I love. During five years, between 1978 and 1982, Dad always spent Christmas with his grandchildren.

Dad's truce with the bottle was fragile at best and in the fall of 1983 he lapsed back into his old habits.<sup>12</sup> Jane and I did not hear from him for months, then only to hear he would not spend Christmas with us. After the New Year, there was another long period of puzzling silence that was broken only by his wife's call on March 17.

Thus did my father live the sixty-one years that was his allotment. As the pall bearers closed his casket and wheeled it away, I found my mind drifting back to a night long ago when I awoke screaming from a nightmare and Dad rushed into my bedroom to cradle me in his strong arms until I stopped trembling. Knowing I would never again feel his strong embrace, I was like the singer in the old folk ballad, I could not hide my sorrow when they carried my Daddy away. Yet I rejoice for him. Dad's sister Sarah said to me that all through his life Dad had never found peace. Rest in peace Dad.

#### Library Placements

This has been a banner period for contributions to key libraries by our cousins. Special note should be made of two contributions of A Vision of Unity by John Bland Mobley to the D.A. Tompkins Memorial Library, Edgefield, South Carolina and to The South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.

Marjorie Bland Sayles of Abilene, Texas donated a copy of A Vision of Unity to The Scarborough Genealogical Library, which is part of the Jay-Rollins Library of McMurry College in Abilene. Marjorie Bland Sayles is the current president of the John Hudnall Chapter of the Daughters of 1812. She will place a chapter bookplate in the Scarborough library's copy of A Vision of Unity upon which will be inscribed, "Presented to the Scarborough Genealogical Library by Marjorie Bland Sayles in loving memory of her father and grandfather, Robert Lafayette Bland (30 July 1879-15 August 1960) and John William Carroll Bland (16 January 1858-1 December 1946)."

Marian Daniels of San Benito, Texas donated a copy of the book to The Illinois State Library, Springfield, Illinois.

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11. See attachment I.

12. Those close to Dad hold varying opinions about why he lapsed back into drinking. Perhaps all of our opinions contain a particle of the whole truth which Dad carried with him to the grave.



