

# Playing Cards

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My great-grandfather was named Hugh. His brother James was a gambler. I guess you could say he made his living gambling, or it might be better said that he spent his life gambling. My grandmother, Hugh's daughter, was born in 1919, so I believe her uncle James, who also was known as "Snake," lived his life of gambling in the 1920s and/or 1930s. I do not remember hearing much about James' gambling after WWII. Given that time frame, I assume the gambling was primarily centered around playing card games, though I don't know that detail specifically. I do know that a good deal of the gambling took place on a river boat. I also know that Hugh's brother showed up at the family farm, that is my grandmother's and his brother's family farm, from time to time when he was "in trouble." I don't know the nature of the trouble, but whether someone was after him because he had taken their money or he was simply out of money (or someone was after him to get money Snake owed) his visits apparently brought along with them a good measure of anxiety for everyone involved. By all reports Snake was quite an unpleasant character altogether, and probably as a result of my great-grandmother's edict, there were no card games on the farm.

Later my grandfather, married to Hugh's daughter and after whom my father was named and therefore after whom I was indirectly named, killed a lot of people in Germany. He put 0.30 calibre bullets into and through a lot of those people with a rifle, and threw hand grenades nearby others. He did this because someone told him to do it. It wasn't a good reason. The number of people my grandfather killed was undoubtedly small compared to the number of people the physicist Richard Feynman considered himself to have killed. Certainly Feynman accomplished most of his killing much more quickly, which seemed to make an impression on Feynman for a while. Of course those weren't Germans who suffered under the hand of Feynman, and the main reason they weren't Germans was that the Germans were considered by some

at the time to be humans. From this perspective maybe each of my grandfather's individual victims "counted" more (at the time). But who's counting?

My grandfather didn't practice his skill of murdering people after he returned to the United States as far as I know. He had also become good at playing cards, and this he did do for a while. The card playing and various other unwelcome activities were ended by the efforts of my grandmother. Her approach was interesting: On a day when my grandfather was not out pursuing his activities, she took my father, then probably about three or four years old, to a movie theatre, or as she would have termed it "to the show." For the price of a single admission the two of them watched the same movie repeatedly for most of the day. The message conveyed by her lengthy absence was enough to accomplish her objective concerning my grandfather. A good number of years after that, I was born and my parents undertook activities resulting in them having limited involvement with me for a while. One might say certain aspects of their involvement with me were limited or eliminated permanently, but that is another story.

I lived with my grandparents when I was young for several years both before and after my grandfather retired. When I first went to live with them cards were not allowed in the household. Later after my grandfather retired he took up playing cards again. He taught me to play blackjack, which I think was probably his main card game back when he was playing (and gambling) after the war. My grandfather impressed upon me early on when he reintroduced cards to the household that one should never (or at least he and I should never) bet money in connection with a game of cards. Playing cards needed to be "just a game," to pass the time I suppose. My grandmother never played blackjack, but all of us played a game called gin rummy and the two of them continued to play that game with each other after I was gone pretty much up until my grandfather died. I could always count on getting a report of who was winning.

What's the point of this story (or these stories)? The point is, first of all, to highlight or illustrate a certain suspicion that some people have, or have had, concerning games of "chance" and card games in particular. This kind of feeling has at times risen to the declaration that such activities are "evil" or should be considered evil in some way. I am not convinced that "passing the time" playing card games is fundamentally evil, but I'm also not convinced that under most circumstances such activities should not be classified as a waste of time. If there is some reason to believe wasting time is evil, well, then that is something to consider.

I definitely think a person can be an evil person, and maybe a person can be a good person too. Good and evil make sense to me. I also think it is worthwhile

to consider carefully what makes an evil person evil and what might make a person good. With this in mind, it seems to me there is a connection between the kind of sentiment concerning playing cards I've described above and the specific people associated with the activity. Hopefully that is something worthwhile to think about.