

INTRODUCTION

I'm a native Texan – born in Houston, reared in Dallas. There are really only three things you need to know about Texas.

1) Summers are long and hot as hell. From the last half of April to the end of September, triple-digit temperatures are common. You grow up with it, you think it's normal. It is not. Global warming begins and ends in Texas. In 2011 alone, Texas had more than 100 consecutive days with temperatures over 100°. I don't pay that much attention anymore but the Weather Channel does; you can see their little red-tinted crawlers at the bottom of the screen even though you may not give a damn about the Southwest. Texas rarely gets rain, unless it's a flood of Biblical proportions; otherwise, it's the Bible belt's equivalent of the Sahara.

2) Extremes are not limited to the weather in Texas. Its politics and religion also occupy a zone otherwise filled with roadkill in any other civilized part of the world. Texas politicians and preachers alike are rock-hard conservative; flexibility is a naughty word down there. Pakistan might learn a thing or two from Austin. The Texas legislature meets for 60 days every two years. Growing up, we used to say we'd have better government if it met for two days every 60 years. But I was never old enough to vote when I lived there.

3) Texas is huge. In my time, it was the largest state in the country until Alaska was admitted as our 49th state in 1959, when I left high school. It covers an area of 300,000 square miles – nearly 800 miles long and more than 700 miles wide. By comparison, my adopted home state of New Jersey is barely 8,000 square miles – 150 miles long and 50 miles wide – the smallest of the Middle Atlantic States. Texas is about three times as large as Honshu, the main island of Japan. Texas' population of 25 million yields a density of 96 people per square mile; with its population of about 120 million, Japan is a can of sardines by comparison, with nearly 900 people per square

mile. Sounds high but it's really nothing to shout about: New Jersey is #1 in the US with 1,200 people per square mile, which may be one reason we're irritable most of the time. New Jersey's state motto is, "You got a problem with that?"

There is a trove of Texas lore in captivity, as you might expect. One day a Texan died and went to heaven. As he stood at the pearly gates St. Peter said to him, "Welcome to heaven, where we have the longest rivers, the tallest mountains and the brightest stars in the sky." As they toured paradise St. Peter asked him, "What do you think?" Tex said, "Well, it ain't nothin' spectacular, I can tell you that. In Texas, we got longer rivers, bigger hills and certainly brighter stars. Hell, we're the fuckin' Lone Star State!"

With that, St. Peter led him to the far edge and gave him a glimpse of hell. Tex looked into the abyss, saw the flames and felt the intense heat. "You got fire that big in Texas?" St. Peter asked. With a nod and a smile, Tex said, "Well, Pete, I tell you what. It's really no big deal. I got a friend in Dallas who's so big he could piss on that fire of yours and put it out real fast."

My ancestors emigrated from Germany to the United States in the mid-19th century. My great-grandfather on my father's side came from Schwäbisch Hall, in Bavaria (Baden-Württemberg today); he settled in St. Louis, the home of Budweiser beer and host to a large and growing German settlement. My maternal grandfather was from Prussia. My paternal grandfather was born in St. Louis in 1870, studied medicine at Heidelberg and returned to teach at Washington University while in private practice as a pediatrician. My Dad was born in St. Louis in 1911, did his undergraduate work at Washington University and earned his Master's in oil accounting there. He had the 2nd-highest score in the nation on his CPA exam in 1933; we had his Elijah Watts Sells silver medal mounted and framed. He joined Price Waterhouse in St. Louis; because of his specialty, they sent him

to Houston in 1939; I was born there in 1941. Nobody gets to choose their birthplace.

I have virtually no memories of Houston, except that's where I smoked my first cigarette at about the age of eight or nine, when my next-door neighbor, a pretty girl, and I explored a nearby house (and each other) one rainy weekend. It was under construction and if memory serves we were too. Shortly thereafter, in a good mood, I rode my bike hands-free around a street corner and smacked into a city bus. I lived to tell about it. No physical damage, only mental (concussions are like that). Not long after, my mother and I were about to take the bus downtown but when I got on, she stayed off. The door closed, the bus took off and she had a good laugh. Germans are like that. Particularly Prussians. I screamed, petrified. Everybody in the bus had a good laugh too, including the driver. I never knew the whole damn town had so many Germans.

So much for Houston, which was just hot and humid and soulless. In 1950, PW promoted Dad and moved him to Dallas to open (and run, as managing partner) a new office there. All I remember is that it was a hell of a long drive from Houston to Dallas, but I felt no sadness at leaving. Hell, I thought, look on the bright side: there might be fewer Germans in Big D. The giant chipmaker known as Texas Instruments was but a tiny company then, called Geophysical Service, Inc. (GSI), making seismic exploration tools for the oil industry. GSI was a PW client. One of its founders, Gene McDermott, became a family friend. TI today is the world's 3rd-largest semiconductor manufacturer after Intel and Samsung.

In the 1950s, Dallas was pretty unsophisticated – a small town with a small-town persona. But it had some charm: streetcars mostly, until their wheels melted and fused to the tracks in summer and the trams got bumped off by buses. And Neiman-Marcus, of course, affectionately called Nieman-Markup. Big D was known more for its cotton exchange than for oil; the state's huge petroleum reserves

were notably in east and west Texas. It wasn't Cowtown; that was Fort Worth, 30 miles west. But it was hot, hot all the time it seemed; no school had airconditioning and the classrooms were like ovens and still we all wore the Texas uniform every day – Levi's or Lee's – despite the heat. What sense did that make? The morning paper, *The Dallas Morning News*, better known by its acronym DaMN, was a crypto-fascist scandal sheet, the most virulent anti-Communist daily in the country – a gun-totin', liberal-bashin', God-fearin', immigrant-hatin', USA-lovin' WASP rag.

Dallas had little culture, no deep history, no saving grace. But all that changed on November 22, 1963, when it achieved everlasting fame. At that point America learned, perhaps for the first time, how conservative Dallas really was: it was the buckle on the Bible Belt, home to rich, right-wing Texans like the Hunt family and the seat of America's most virulent strain of anti-Communism.

While he commanded the Army's 24th Infantry Division in Europe, General Edwin Walker started a mandatory anti-Communist indoctrination program for his troops and distributed right-wing literature to soldiers in his division. He claimed that Harry Truman, Eleanor Roosevelt and Dean Acheson were “definitely pink,” and told his soldiers how to vote. Relieved of his command, he chose to resign from the Army so he could “do, as a civilian, what is no longer possible to do in uniform.” He made Dallas his home.

Like the rest of the former Confederate States of America, Texas was still segregated at the time and Dallas was too. In that part of the country, segregation was “normal;” kids my age never thought about it. We had left the state by the time Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks had become household names in the fight for civil rights. The most powerful church in town was the First Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist icon and the first megachurch of its kind. Its pastor, the Rev. W. A. Criswell, was arguably the most feared. A fire and

brimstone preacher, he wrote a book titled *Why the Bible is Literally True*; he fought openly with liberal theologians and got them tossed out of the Southern Baptist convention.

Evidence of Dallas' thin culture and short history abound. The Dallas Zoo was quite different from the world-class Bronx Zoo, for example, where the names of the animals are posted in both English and Latin. At the Dallas zoo, we used to joke that the tags were just in English because they only had room for the animals' names and the best recipes for cooking them.

Dallas was my home for nearly a decade. This was long before the Salk vaccine, when many people, my mother included, thought that polio was caused by overexposure to extreme heat, which Dallas had in abundance – long before bicycle helmets, seatbelts, voting rights or Medicare. But judging by backyard construction projects at the time, and in keeping with its anti-Communist beacon, Dallas may have had the nation's highest concentration of fallout shelters in captivity. We used to conduct regular bomb drills at school, in the belief that squatting under our rickety wooden desks would somehow protect us from Hiroshima-like radiation in case of a nuclear attack. Soviet and American sabers rattled regularly back then, spawned by two of the world's most hard-over politicians: John Foster Dulles in Washington and Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, in Moscow. Khrushchev would later become famous for banging his shoe at the UN. Big deal. Dulles was the son of Presbyterian missionaries and a card-carrying member of the God Squad, despite his Phi Beta Kappa Princeton education. Take that.

With my German heritage, I can truthfully say that German culture is best known for three prominent characteristics: first, Germans are incontrovertibly rational; second, they are insufferably serious; and third, as a result, they have no endearing sense of humor. My father's side of the family may be an exception, but they were Bavarian. (So,

some might say, was Hitler, but that's not really true. He was Austrian.) The German language, in which I was tutored from a young age by my father, is not known for its subtlety: it is blunt, it is direct, and it sounds horribly dramatic. It was only later that I would read Mark Twain's iconic essay, "The Awful German Language," but a popular anecdote brings this truth home.

If French is the language of poetry and love, German is the language of anal-retentive philosophers and Wagnerian opera. In the early 18th century, Philip V of Spain, himself a Frenchman and grandson of King Louis XIV, was once asked how many languages he spoke. "Well," he replied, "I speak Spanish, of course, so I can address my subjects. I speak French with my loving wife. I speak Latin, too, when I see the Pope. And I speak German, so I can talk to my horse." Philip is still Spain's longest-reigning monarch.

They say there's a lot to a name and this may be true. My grandfather's given name was Adolph, so my father became Adolph Jr. I had been in line to become Adolph III (I love Roman numerals) until Adolf Hitler came along and ruined this first name forever. As a child, I was tormented in grade school in Houston and in Dallas. Kids would taunt me often, saying "Go back to Germany!" or "Your Dad has the same name as Hitler!" or, more commonly, "Hey, Nazi!" You quickly develop a thick skin. Decades later, when I ran for public office in New Jersey, members of the teachers union would leave me similar voicemails saying, "Why don't you go back to the land of your Nazi ancestors?" Water off a duck's back. I used to wonder, if I had a complete transfusion could I get rid of my German blood?

German names are often mistaken for being Jewish, however, and I remember this was sometimes a problem in Dallas. "Stein" in German is pronounced "stine," not "steen," but no matter. Most people can't make the distinction. Nor can many organizations. My

father was an avid (though not particularly skilled) golfer, golf being (then as now) the businessman's favorite pastime. He wanted to join the Dallas Country Club, then the town's classiest. Despite his senior PW position, the requisite reference letters and the up-front cash, DCC turned him down because "we don't accept Jews here." Mother was furious, but Dad simply turned his back and applied to Brook Hollow, where he was accepted (and was later president, from 1960~62). I never faced that particular problem in high school; my friends were Jewish, Unitarian or non-denominational. One great thing about being young is that prejudice takes time to grow roots. We had equal-opportunity friendships, irrespective of gender, ethnicity or national origin.

But our surname, with the triple "s" configuration, gave folks other problems (and still does): nobody believes it. In databases it's still "corrected" without our knowledge because undereducated clerks simply refuse to accept the legal spelling. "Schloss," rendered Schloß in German using the *eszett* ligature, means castle; "stein" means stone. It dates back to the 15th century in Schwäbisch Hall, representing a long line of Bavarian forebears. If you visit this tiny town today, you will see the family name *Schloßstein* carved on a lot of gravestones. My Japanese surname, which I would acquire much later, is 城石, pronounced Shiro Ishi (literally "Castle Stone"), and a first name しきぶ (shikibu), a pun on the famous 11th-century Japanese novelist Shikibu Murasaki, who wrote *The Tale of Genji*.

Our family, for generations, was Protestant, though in the early 20th century *Großvater* joined the Ethical Cultural Society in St. Louis. There being no ECS in Dallas, we joined the Unitarian Church at first, a faith that was pea-soup bland compared to the fire and brimstone being preached downtown. In Sunday school we mostly did crossword puzzles and sang songs and tried to look up girls' dresses. I wondered if they even had a Bible. But this tactic didn't sit well with mother, who wanted to move more in the cream of Dallas

society, so she was the power behind our shift to the biggest church in captivity, Highland Park Presbyterian.

With more than 6,000 parishioners, it dwarfed the First Baptist in size if not in influence. The theology of its pastor, Dr. William (Wild Bill) Elliott, was less pointy-edged than that of Rev. Criswell, but he often made mother so mad by the end of Sunday service she couldn't wait to get home for a stiff Scotch. Still, she wanted to be seen by others in her Sunday finest. We all had to endure the ritual of Calvinistic routines, but I failed. While in high school, I had read the works of contemporary theologians like Paul Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann, whose breakthrough book *Entmythologisierung des neuen Testaments* was about demythologizing the New Testament (one that Tea Party members and strict creationists alike ought to read today). So when I was asked who had had the most influence on my theology, I naturally said, "Bultmann, hands-down." Wrong answer. They expected me to say Dr. Elliott. In those days, young people just didn't know how to lie the way they do now. Still, like they say, every cloud has a silver lining: Wild Bill Elliott's younger daughter, Jeannette, an early romance, was really hot.

To escape the heat, we would alternate summer vacations between Santa Fe, where the air was cool, and visits to St. Louis, to see the grandparents. St. Louis enchanted me: it had the Mississippi River and the St. Louis Cardinals, my first brush with major league baseball. Ever since my antennae were tuned north I couldn't wait to leave home, for Chicago maybe, or New York. Dallas had no professional teams at the time, regardless of sport. Texas League baseball or live boxing, bloody and uncivilized. That was about it.

My father was point-on absorbed by accounting and auditing, and he was damn good at it. Numbers defined his life. He would leave for the office at 7:00am every morning and be home for dinner by 7:00pm, though after dinner his best friends were *Fortune* magazine

and *The Wall Street Journal*. Wednesday afternoons and all day Saturday and Sunday he disappeared on the golf course. This got to mother over time; by the time I entered high school, she had been diagnosed with depression and institutionalized. Those days, you treated mental illness with zombies or electroshock therapy. Antidepressants like Prozac and Zoloft were decades away.

Texas gave the country two presidents, LBJ and George W. Bush. (Bush *père* didn't count; he was a transplanted Yankee.) LBJ's legacy was Vietnam, of course, which ruined him, and W gave us the War on Terror and Iraq. Both men, their brains fried by the Texas heat, were arrogant, stubborn and hard. No wonder W was a D student at Yale. Will American voters ever learn?

But I digress. When it comes to Texas, most Americans probably don't know that the state "served" under six flags:

- 1) Spain (1519~1685 and again 1690~1821). Spain once occupied a large chunk of the United States west of the Mississippi.
- 2) France (1685~1690), after displacing the Spanish.
- 3) Mexico (1821~1836), which knocked off Spain to become independent, when it claimed Texas as its own.
- 4) The Republic of Texas (1836~1845), after winning independence from Mexico.
- 5) The Confederate States of America (1861~1865). Part of Dixie.
- 6) The Stars and Stripes (1845~1860, 1865~present), despite conservative Republican Gov. Rick Perry's recent claim that Texas has the constitutional right to secede from the nation again.

Speaking of Six Flags, most folks may not realize that this huge entertainment company has its corporate headquarters in Dallas. It opened its first theme park there in 1960 and has since expanded to 14 sites across North America and 7 overseas, making it the world's largest in terms of locations and fifth-largest in attendance.

But as I say, Texas is best known for its insufferable heat, which over time has spawned a lot of popular folklore. In summer, for example, Texas farmers have to feed their hens crushed ice or they'll lay hard-boiled eggs. Asphalt turns to liquid in August. Once when a Texan died and went to hell, the Devil told him he'd never see a hotter place. "Hell, this ain't so bad," the Texan said. "Kinda like our spring." In the Old Testament, when Noah built the ark and it poured for forty days and forty nights, Texas got less than a half-inch of rain. It doesn't matter which faucet you turn, hot water comes out both taps. And my favorite: when a Texan moves to Oklahoma, it raises the IQ level of both states.

By now you're probably wondering, "How in the world did a native Texan of German heritage escape the thin history and shallow culture of a place like Texas to the rich history and deep culture of Japan halfway around the world in East Asia?"

Good question. All I can say at this point is, keep reading.