

DODD'S LUCK



The Dodd family in 1913. Top row,
Edwin and Susan; middle row, Edwin Jr.
(Pat) and Ruth; in front, John and Bob.

Chapter 1

The First Star of Galax

THEY ASSEMBLED IN FRONT of their home, in the proper photographic pose of the day. It was a spring day in 1913, and the Dodds stood still long enough for a family portrait to be snapped. On the second step of the stairs leading to the front porch stood Edwin Dodd and his wife, Susan. There was Edwin: three-piece suit, gold watch chain shimmering, a round-collar white dress shirt, hair slicked down, and a serious, almost stern countenance. And Susan: radiant in a long-sleeved white dress that kissed her white shoetops, arms clasped behind her back, yet her face as dour as her spouse's.

One step below stood the oldest of the four children, Edwin by name but known to all as Pat: cabby's hat, white shirt and tie, hands thrust into the pockets of his knickers. Beside him the only daughter, Ruth, also in white, like her mother, hands at her side, hair pulled back severely, unsmiling.

And down on the sidewalk stood the little ones, John and Bob. That's what Bobby Dodd was known as while growing up. Bob. Bobby came years later. John and Bob sported bow ties with their white shirts and dark shorts. Just one thing was missing. Two, actually: their shoes and socks.

The barefoot boys, standing at attention. Little Bob, just four years old, looking straight at the camera. He does not look down at his feet, which are covered in mud. Which is not exactly what Edwin and Susan Dodd had in mind when they thought to take a family portrait.

But even then, as now, Bobby Dodd liked to enjoy himself and life. And if that meant running around in a muddy yard before a family photo session, so be it. He knew how to enjoy himself without getting into real trouble, knew how to keep his nose clean. His feet, though, were another matter.

He was born a Blue Ridge boy, born at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains, in a tiny frontier town in southwestern Virginia called Galax (pronounced GAY-lax). He has not returned to his birthplace in more than four decades, but, to this day, Bobby Dodd thinks of that place as home.

"I'm a Virginian," says Dodd. "I claim Galax as my home. The Blue Ridge Mountains and Galax. That's my heritage."

Ralph McGill, the late, great editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* wrote often and lovingly of Dodd, usually referring to him as "the tall Tennessean." McGill, a Nashville native, had seen Dodd play football at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Most others, though, have always associated Bobby Dodd with Georgia Tech. Indeed, the two have become so intertwined as to become inseparable. But Robert Lee Dodd is a Virginian, in his mind, in his heart, and in his bloodlines.

Edwin Dodd appropriately named the youngest of his four children for his hero, General Robert E. Lee, a Virginian, a southern gentleman, and one of the most respected military strategists in American history. Yet Robert Lee Dodd's Virginia roots grow deeper than his birthplace and namesake.

In 1607, a group of English colonists, adventurers, and entrepreneurs sailed the Atlantic and settled on the Virginia coast. They established Jamestown, the first permanent English colony in America. Among that company of colonists were three brothers from York, England: John, James, and William Nuckolls.

One of their descendants, Charles Nuckolls, left the coast in 1780 and moved to the rugged southwestern part of Virginia, where he bought one thousand acres of land on the New River and Cripple Creek. Other members of the Nuckolls family soon followed him westward.

One hundred twenty-eight years later, three centuries after the first Nuckolls arrived in Virginia, Susan Viola Nuckolls Dodd gave birth to Robert Lee Dodd, an heir worthy in name and demeanor of his cavalier heritage.

Like the Nuckolls, the Dodds also trace their ancestry to England. George Dodd arrived in Boston in 1650. Later relatives settled farther south in North Carolina and Virginia. One became an ambassador to Germany, another, William Dodd, was a captain in the American Revolution. William's great-grandson, Lorenzo R. Dodd, fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War and was wounded at Dry Creek at the Battle of White Sulphur, Virginia. A century later, John Dodd, Bobby's only surviving sibling, actually interviewed a Confederate veteran while researching the family history. The old man recalled that "Lieutenant Dodd was retreating hastily across the creek, when he was shot in the lower dorsal region."

After the war, Lorenzo—or Ren, as he was known—and Berkeley, his father, left Buchanan and headed farther west into southwestern Virginia, first to Bland and finally settling in Tazewell. On September 5, 1869, a son was born to Lorenzo and Harriet Dodd and was christened Edwin Witten Dodd. Bobby Dodd's father.

For years, Ren Dodd owned and operated a livery business in Tazewell,

"I'm a Virginian," says Dodd. "I claim Galax as my home. The Blue Ridge Mountains and Galax. That's my heritage."

Ralph McGill, the late, great editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* wrote often and lovingly of Dodd, usually referring to him as "the tall Tennessean." McGill, a Nashville native, had seen Dodd play football at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Most others, though, have always associated Bobby Dodd with Georgia Tech. Indeed, the two have become so intertwined as to become inseparable. But Robert Lee Dodd is a Virginian, in his mind, in his heart, and in his bloodlines.

Edwin Dodd appropriately named the youngest of his four children for his hero, General Robert E. Lee, a Virginian, a southern gentleman, and one of the most respected military strategists in American history. Yet Robert Lee Dodd's Virginia roots grow deeper than his birthplace and namesake.

In 1607, a group of English colonists, adventurers, and entrepreneurs sailed the Atlantic and settled on the Virginia coast. They established Jamestown, the first permanent English colony in America. Among that company of colonists were three brothers from York, England: John, James, and William Nuckolls.

One of their descendants, Charles Nuckolls, left the coast in 1780 and moved to the rugged southwestern part of Virginia, where he bought one thousand acres of land on the New River and Cripple Creek. Other members of the Nuckolls family soon followed him westward.

One hundred twenty-eight years later, three centuries after the first Nuckolls arrived in Virginia, Susan Viola Nuckolls Dodd gave birth to Robert Lee Dodd, an heir worthy in name and demeanor of his cavalier heritage.

Like the Nuckolls, the Dodds also trace their ancestry to England. George Dodd arrived in Boston in 1650. Later relatives settled farther south in North Carolina and Virginia. One became an ambassador to Germany, another, William Dodd, was a captain in the American Revolution. William's great-grandson, Lorenzo R. Dodd, fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War and was wounded at Dry Creek at the Battle of White Sulphur, Virginia. A century later, John Dodd, Bobby's only surviving sibling, actually interviewed a Confederate veteran while researching the family history. The old man recalled that "Lieutenant Dodd was retreating hastily across the creek, when he was shot in the lower dorsal region."

After the war, Lorenzo—or Ren, as he was known—and Berkeley, his father, left Buchanan and headed farther west into southwestern Virginia, first to Bland and finally settling in Tazewell. On September 5, 1869, a son was born to Lorenzo and Harriet Dodd and was christened Edwin Witten Dodd. Bobby Dodd's father.

For years, Ren Dodd owned and operated a livery business in Tazewell,

as well as a hotel. As did many hotels of that era and area, the Dodd Hotel featured a regular poker game of some renown. The drummers, or traveling salesmen, who stayed at the hotel often spent much of their nights playing poker or shooting pool. Edwin Dodd grew up watching and learning pool and poker, game skills he later passed on to his sons just as Ren Dodd had done.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Edwin Dodd, then 30, married a woman eight years younger. On March 5, 1900, Dodd wed Susan Viola Nuckolls in her hometown of Oldtown, eight miles west of what would become Galax. Their first two children were born in Glade Spring, Virginia: Pat in 1901 and Ruth in 1903. By the time John arrived in 1906 and Bobby in 1908, the Dodds had moved to Galax.

Galax is a mountain town (the Appalachian Trail runs down Main Street) located in a high valley, which runs south from the Potomac River into North Carolina. The countryside is rolling, gentle, grassy hills. Farms abound still. The Blue Ridge Parkway sits seven miles to the south.

When the town was officially founded in 1903 in an area known as Anderson's Bottoms, it was known as Bonaparte. No one knows why. The name was changed to Galax—for the heart-shaped leaves abundant there—shortly after the Norfolk and Western Railway Company extended its rail line 2.72 miles and linked the town to Fries, Virginia, on December 3, 1903.

The railroad brought new people and new prosperity and also helped remove the mud. Galax easily could have been called Little Muddy. Mud was everywhere, not just on young Bobby Dodd's feet. There were deep, dangerous mudholes, some right on Main Street, in the heart of town.

One mudhole was so deep, a fence rail could be pushed down into it and disappear. Local legend has it that a young boy was plowing near that mudhole when his mule was frightened, bolted, and ran right into the bog. Both plow and mule sank from view. A taller tale tells of a man walking down Main Street when he spotted a hat in the mudhole. He walked over, picked it up, and discovered a man's head underneath. When the pedestrian asked the stranger if he was all right, the man in the mud replied, "I am, mister, but I'm a little concerned about the horse I'm riding." A canal was constructed in conjunction with the railroad and the problems with mudholes were eased.

After the railroad was extended to the area, a horse and mule trader named J. P. Carico and several other men formed a land company, bought most of the land that is now present-day Galax, and hired an engineer to lay out the new town. On December 17, 1905, the first lot sales drew a large but unenthusiastic crowd.

Many prospective buyers couldn't fathom the wide streets and sidewalks. Surely, they thought, this place wouldn't prosper to the point

where street cars would be necessary. Why squander all that good ground, particularly at such steep prices? In the main part of town, prices ranged from \$100 to \$250 for a corner lot; a few blocks away, lots went for \$50. Most people left, disgruntled.

Edwin Dodd, though, stayed and paid.

By the time Bobby Dodd was born, the population of Galax was pushing six hundred. Of those six hundred, Edwin Dodd had one of the best jobs in town. He helped develop the financing to open the Galax Furniture Company, which thrived in an area abundant with virgin timber. Edwin Dodd became the first manager of the furniture company, the biggest industry in town.

"I had an extremely happy life," Bobby Dodd said, "with a wonderful mother and a wonderful daddy. I was spoiled a little bit, but I had a great life.

"My daddy was a great guy. He was always in good humor and kept the family pretty much in good humor. He had a good job and a good salary. I believe he was paid five hundred dollars a month. I remember he showed me his checks. That must have been a fabulous salary for that day.

"My daddy loved people. He loved his family. He loved music. More than anything, he taught me and my brothers and sister to enjoy life. My daddy played with us, and we had a great time. He was a fun daddy. He created a lot of pleasure for us, and we all enjoyed it."

The house in which Bobby Dodd was born—in front of which he posed barefoot—sits on the corner of Grayson and Lafayette, at 312 Grayson Street, on the west side of town. The porch has since been enclosed. "A pretty modest bungalow," John Dodd called it. Two bedrooms upstairs, with the master bedroom on the main floor. For a while, John and Bobby slept on a trundle bed that slid out from beneath their parents' bed. Yet life was cozy, not cramped, in the Dodd household, and also comfortable and fun.

"We had a little shed, or barn," John Dodd said, "with a little pony and later a mare. We didn't get the pool table till we moved into the second house."

The second house, the big house, was right up Lafayette Street, built up on a hill on a triangular corner lot at Lafayette and Stuart Drive. Then, it sat on the outskirts of town, four or five blocks walking distance to the Galax Furniture Company. The Dodd boys used to ride their sleds down the hill out back, using a brush pile for a jump.

Today the old Dodd house at 310 Lafayette is a boarding house where an older couple rents out rooms on the first and second floors. Despite its white aluminum siding and storm windows, it has the forlorn look of a house that has seen far better days. And it has.

Bobby Dodd was five when the family moved into the new frame

house built in 1913. The house on Lafayette had two floors, a spacious basement, and a wraparound porch. The three boys shared an upstairs bedroom, while Ruth had her own room. Mrs. Dodd maintained a flower room in the cupola and kept milk in her spring room. Irene Alderman, Bobby Dodd's first cousin, still lives in Galax. She remembers that house and how immaculately Mrs. Susan Dodd kept it. She called Mrs. Dodd Aunt Viola.

"The living room had light pink velvet chairs and a settee," Mrs. Alderman said. "The dining room was in the middle of the house. It had a fireplace with green ceramic tiles all around it." There was also a fireplace in the kitchen, where Mrs. Dodd, a wonderful cook, concocted delicious dishes. The house had all the amenities, too.

"We had running water and a bathroom," John Dodd recalled proudly, "which an awful lot of people didn't have at that time." They even had electricity, that marvel of the age which had finally come to Galax in 1908, the same year Bobby Dodd was born.

Most importantly, the house had a large side yard which, to a child, seemed enormous. "Boy, it was big," Bobby Dodd remembered. "It looked like a football field, one hundred yards to a little boy like me. That's where I learned to pass and punt and play football, really, in that yard. My older brother Pat was on the high school team. Big stuff to us was to get out there in that yard and tackle that other fellow. Punt, pass, and tackle.

"We'd play two, three, four on a side. Go to school early to play before school, then play after, too. Our clothes were always torn."

They'd play back behind the Methodist church, too, with kids like Sam Hampton and Jack Schooley, who lived across the street from the Dodds. Football wasn't the only game played in the Dodd household, though. "My daddy taught me to play cards—all the games of the time, and later bridge and gin rummy," Dodd said.

Edwin Dodd also taught his children gymnastics. "My daddy put mattresses up in the attic to practice gymnastics. He taught me how to stand on my head, walk on my hands, do flips, cartwheels, things a lot of boys don't have the opportunity to learn.

"After supper, we'd usually end up in the attic doing cartwheels and everything." Bobby Dodd would later perfect these stunts in high school, then put them to good use as a young assistant at Georgia Tech, where he would bet players milkshakes that he could walk ten yards on his hands faster than they could. And he usually could.

"We'd either do gymnastics after supper," Dodd said, "or shoot pool."

Ah, pool. After moving into the bigger house, Edwin Dodd bought a pool table at a bankruptcy sale after a local pool hall had gone out of business. He put the pool table down in the basement of the big house, and he and his offspring played often. Others watched enviously.

"They had the only pool table in town," Irene Alderman said.

In pool, as in other activities, Bobby Dodd took his cue from his father. "My daddy taught me to be a good pool player," said Dodd, who later made his mark—and some enemies—with his pool cue. Even today, he has a pool table in his basement. Even today, Dodd uses his original, peculiar style when shooting a game of eight ball.

"He was a great pool player," John Dodd said. "But he was so short when he started playing that he just had it laying on his hand, in his palm, with his other hand under the cue stick." Instead of holding the cue dangling down by his waist and stroking it, little Bobby Dodd had to raise his right arm, as if he were giving a clenched fist salute, put the cue in his palm, and stroke it. It looked funny; still does. But the older men he hustled in later years saw nothing funny in it at all.

Edwin and Susan Dodd encouraged their children to play something else besides football and games of chance. "All of us chose an instrument to play," Bobby Dodd said. "Pat played the saxophone, mother the guitar, John the piano. I played the violin."

Jack Benny had nothing to worry about. Each August, Galax still holds an Old Fiddler's Convention, where pickers come from miles around to play the bluegrass music Bobby Dodd loves so well. Loving it and performing it, however, are two different things.

"After I played violin for a year, my parents decided to have a recital," Dodd said. "That ended my violin career, because I was not gonna take part in any recital. I didn't like going to violin lessons, anyway. My buddies used to tease me about that. So I switched to the ukulele."

Arthur Godfrey had nothing to worry about either. "The ukulele was a lot of fun," Dodd said. "I could copy my mother on her chords. But only Pat got good at playing instruments. None of us ever got to be worth a tutti-frutti at it except Pat. He did play some and had his own orchestra later on. But we had music in our family, and we had fun in our family."

In 1916, one of the first Model-T Fords pattered into Galax. A Model-T cost about \$750 then. The contrasts between the combustible engine car and the country town of Dodd's youth were striking. A local man named Bob Caldwell drove that first Model-T down the dirt path that was Main Street and pulled up next to two oxen pulling a covered wagon.

Oxen and other livestock were common sights on Main Street in those days. Farmers would drive cattle, sheep, and even turkeys down Grayson Street and into the pens at Chestnut Yard, at the railroad station, before loading them onto the train.

Susan Viola Dodd's influence on her family extended far beyond the encouragement of music appreciation. Her children adored her, and Bobby Dodd recalls her lovingly. "My mother was the finest mother, the finest wife, the greatest cook you ever saw," he said. He can still give a loving, longing litany of his mother's best dishes. "Whipped cream pie," Dodd said, his eyes almost glazing over. "Potato soup. And bread, fresh bread at all three meals—rolls or hot bread or salt-rising bread. It was different then, you ate all three meals at home. No one went out to restaurants. And my daddy came home from work for lunch. He'd walk home for lunch, and Mama would have fresh bread for every meal!"

Mama's menu continued. "Buckwheat cakes," Dodd said, closing his eyes and smacking his lips. "I'd give \$25 for buckwheat cakes now. When my sister was living here up the street in those apartments, where WSB-TV is, she'd make buckwheat cakes for me. My sister didn't fool with 'em much, though, 'cause they smelled with that yeast. But I loved buckwheat cakes. And I miss 'em.

"Mama could cook anything, and she'd put up preserves and jellies. And Mama's scalloped potatoes. I loved scalloped potatoes. Pies. Desserts.

"Now, we didn't know what it was to have meat like they do today, like a filet. We didn't know what a filet mignon was, or a T-bone. Only thing my mama bought was...I don't know what it was called but we called it a country steak. I can remember when she served it to us. It had gravy over it. I can see her now, she beat it, kinda like with a hammer thing, to make it soft and tender, and I can see her beating it now in the kitchen. When she served it, she always served it with creamed gravy. I loved the creamed gravy, but I didn't like the meat much, 'cause it was too tough and my teeth were too bad. But I loved that creamed gravy. I never ate steak when I was in college, and I hardly eat steak today."

"She was a Nuckolls," said Glenn Pless, a distant relative of Bobby Dodd's "and all the Nuckolls were great cooks."

"But Mama," Dodd said, "was supposed to be the best of all!"

Mrs. Dodd was loved for more than her cooking, though. And so was her husband. "I remember what kind people they were," Irene Alderman said. "Very kind and civic-minded. They spent a lot of money on other people, probably too much money.

"Each Christmas, Uncle Edwin and Aunt Viola brought us a real nice toy. We wouldn't have had much of a Christmas without them."

Christmas in Edwin Dodd's house began on Christmas Eve. The tree was always standing in the cupola, beautifully decorated. Dodd would let each of his children open a present or two on Christmas Eve and the rest on Christmas morning. Bobby Dodd followed this custom with his children. "Kids love it," Dodd said. "They get two Christmases.

"We always had a nice Christmas. My daddy was generous and bought

things for a lot of people."

One year, Bobby got a tricycle for Christmas. "A bigggg tricycle," he remembered. An old-fashioned tricycle, with an enormous front wheel. Bobby rode it everywhere through the house, and his mother was terrified he would ram the furniture. Eventually, he would pedal it outside on the dirt streets.

Later, he graduated to a Christmas bicycle. "An Iver Johnson," Dodd said proudly. "We'd put a big plank on the fence, ride it up, the plank goes down, then you go down the other side. But you had to do it fast or you fell off the other side. Woooooo!"

One Christmas, Edwin Dodd bought his two youngest sons greyhound puppies. "I don't know what in the world possessed him," Bobby Dodd said, "but can you imagine in Galax, Virginia, what in the devil you're gonna do with greyhounds? Everybody in Galax had a shepherd dog, or collie, or beagle, or mixed breed. Hell, everybody had a dog. But a greyhound? John had his about three months when it got sick and died. I kept mine, full grown. I'd run with him, but a greyhound was out of place in the Blue Ridge Mountains."

Mr. Dodd's generosity extended beyond the Christmas season. During World War I, rationing put many goods in short supply. Irene Alderman recalls how she and her sister Kit would cry because they had no sugar to put on their oatmeal. One morning, their Uncle Edwin left a pail of sugar outside their kitchen, so his nieces would have sugar with their morning oatmeal.

By then, Edwin Dodd was doing very well financially. "He was just a good businessman," John Dodd said. "he owned a grocery store—the Cash Racket—and a small movie theater, too. He brought a lot of Hawaiian groups into the theater and always entertained them after the show at our house. He also owned a drug store and soda fountain."

Dodd's good business sense certainly helped when the Galax Furniture Company burned to the ground in 1917.

"Furniture factories were fire traps in those days—all wood," John Dodd said. "I remember seeing the fire from the cupola in our second house about three o'clock in the morning. All our family was up watching the fire four or five blocks away. When a furniture factory caught on fire back in those days, there was nothing you could do for it. You just had to let it burn."

The ashes had barely stopped smoldering when Dodd found another job, managing another furniture factory in Bluefield, West Virginia, about 60 miles north of Galax on the state line. The Dodds lived in Bluefield for nearly a year, the longest year in Bobby Dodd's life.

"That just broke my heart," Dodd said. "I didn't want to leave Galax where all my relatives were and all the young kids my age, first cousins

most of 'em. We got to Bluefield, it was a new world to me. They sent me to school.

"They took me to school each morning, and when recess came, I ran for home. I went home every recess. I never stayed longer than recess. ...Mama wouldn't punish me, she would just take me back the next day. But I never went back after recess. Mama felt sorry for me. I was unhappy. I guess I was crying, and I wanted to be with my mama. And I didn't know anybody there. They were all strangers to me, and I didn't like 'em. I don't know how long that lasted. She may have finally let me drop out of school, because I never remember going to school a full day there.

"And a strange thing happened. We're in a picture show one night, my daddy took us to the picture show, and somebody came in and tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'Mr. Dodd, the furniture factory's on fire.' The furniture factory catches on fire, it couldn't be a greater fire, it's all timber, all wood, and it just burned to the ground. And we moved back to Galax."

Edwin Dodd helped raise the funds to build another furniture factory in Galax, managed the factory, and returned his family to its home on Lafayette Street (which Dodd had been renting out). "I was happy then," Bobby Dodd said. "The only real sad part of my young life that I remember was in Bluefield. I hate to say it, but I was glad that furniture factory burned down."

Back in Galax winters were harsh. When it snowed, which it did often, the Dodd boys and their friends would block off their streets and sled down those hilly dirt paths. They also built fires to warm themselves between rides. At Christmastime, many local boys would tramp into the woods, cut down cedars, carry them back into town, and sell them as Christmas trees. Many families would often go "galacking," collecting galax leaves in bags and selling them for holiday floral decorations.

Come spring, though, and especially come summertime, it was baseball time. "Baseball was big stuff in Galax," Bobby Dodd said. "Football was very popular but, strange thing, we never saw a basketball game in Galax. We didn't know what basketball looked like. But baseball was big stuff.

"The big social event of the week was the baseball team playing the neighboring town. Everybody had a baseball team: Pulaski, Whitfield, Roanoke. On Saturday afternoon, you had a baseball game and everybody in town went out and watched the baseball team play!"

They played in Felts Park, or the Fairgrounds, as it was also known

because of the occasional horse races there. It's a 16-acre park smack in the middle of town, behind the old YMCA.

"Back then, Felts Park had soft, spongy turf," Glenn Pless said, "so you couldn't get hurt."

Bobby Dodd managed to get hurt there once, though, in a baseball game composed of kids teams from the north and south sides of town (Center Street divides Galax in half). "Bob was the captain," recalled childhood friend Sam Hampton. "He liked to make teams, tell us things, from when he was a little fella on up."

This day, Sam was pitching. Bobby Dodd was catching. But he missed a foul tip, and it hit him squarely in the throat. In those days, kids had no such equipment as a catcher's mask or chest protector.

"It scared me to death," Hampton said. "Bob couldn't talk and was coughing like crazy. But that rascal, he kept playing. He switched to pitcher, and I caught. I don't care what the score was, that Bob Dodd was still in there scrapping. There wasn't no quit in that Bob."

There was another catcher in town with far more renown than Bobby Dodd, though. "The catcher on the town baseball team was ol' Jim Anderson," said Dodd, "who was our town policeman and he was my second cousin. And, of course, I was very proud of ol' Jim...but because he was a baseball player, not because he was a policeman.

"Now ol' Jim pulled a play that I have never seen before," Dodd continued. "I've never seen it or heard of it before. I'd go down to the police station every Saturday morning, and ol' Jim would sit there with a big Irish potato and a knife, and he'd peel that Irish potato white until he'd get it just the size of a baseball.

"Come Saturday afternoon, ol' Jim would have that Irish potato in his hip pocket. As soon as the visitors got a runner on third base, that's when ol' Jim would pull his play. He'd reach back in his hip pocket and he'd get that Irish potato and he'd cup it in his hand where no one could see it. And he'd signal for a pitchout. And when that baseball hit his mitt, he took that Irish potato and threw it ten feet over our third baseman's head. And here comes that runner, diggin' for home. And here's ol' Jim with the baseball.

"And ol' Jim would tag him and the damndest fight you ever saw would start. 'What's this?!' And our umpire would say, 'You're out!' And then the other team would really holler, 'You can't call us out! Your baseball's out there in left field!'"

Which is where Glenn Pless was playing when ol' Jim Anderson first used the hidden potato trick. "Nat Hester's on third base, leading, and Jim throws the ball wild, beyond third base into left field. I went running after it. I thought, 'My Lord, here we've lost that ballgame!' When I picked it up, I saw what it was but I still threw it in."

"That's when they had the big argument," Sam Hampton said.

"I can still hear big Jim: 'You show me in the rule book where it says anything about an Irish potato!' " Pless said. "After about thirty or forty minutes, they decided maybe it wasn't quite right and played it over."

Ol' Jim was convinced it was right. "He did that every week, you know," Dodd said. "You didn't scout anybody back then. Until finally, ol' Jim got a little arrogant and he tried it over at Low Oak. And I remember they carried him back in an ambulance. That's the last time the play was ever used. They just beat the hell outta him.

"I was ten years old at the time, and getting old enough to enjoy sports. I was interested in sports all my life. . . . I guess in many ways, I was kind of a Tom Sawyer or Huckleberry Finn. I just hated school. I didn't get in a lot of trouble, but I had to be active. I was kinda hyper. I had to be playing football, I had to be doing something.

"I couldn't sit around and read. I hated to read. You know, I didn't want anybody reading to me. If I'd a had a fishing hole, I'd a been out fishing, but I didn't have a fishing hole. So the next thing we could do, really, was play football and shoot pool a lot."

So Bobby Dodd did both. Better to live like Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn than to have to read about them. "He was always playing ball," Irene Alderman said. "Played on an empty field. Whether it was baseball or football, he was always playing ball."

"I was planning on playing high school football in Galax," Dodd said. "My dream was to play in the VMI-VPI football game in Roanoke, Virginia, on Thanksgiving Day. That was the biggest event in Virginia. They were big rivals. The only school I would have thought about going to would have been VPI, which was in Blacksburg.

"Blacksburg wasn't too far away from us [about 45 miles northeast of Galax]. VMI was in Lexington, and I wouldn't have gone to VMI anyway 'cause it was a military school and I would've hated that. But I would've gone to VPI."

And he well might have, had the Galax Furniture Company not been sold in 1921 to the Vaughan-Bassett Furniture Company of Bassett, Virginia. "I think my daddy may have made some money on the sale, and I think he may have saved some money also out of his salary," Dodd said. "I know he had some money. I don't know how much, have no idea. But back then, ten thousand dollars was like two hundred thousand dollars today."

"Our father was apparently doing pretty well," John Dodd said. "Besides those other business interests he had, he'd been involved with some timber business. They called 'em cross ties, mining ties, all kinds of things, timber products.

"Once the furniture company was sold, he decided he'd just close everything out then and move to Kingsport. He was trying to buy some business

DODD'S LUCK

over there in Kingsport that would develop good for the kids."

So Edwin Dodd moved his family 75 miles southwest to Kingsport, in the east Tennessee hill country. "I don't know why he chose Kingsport," Bobby Dodd said. "But that changed my life."