

Jason M. Jones

Gunslinger

My grandfather, in the end, was a small hunched man, balding with gray strands sticking out the side of his scalp, but he frightened me nevertheless with his direct questions: "So you got a girlfriend yet?" Truth is, I don't remember him much at all. But my father, his youngest son, once told me a story about when he and his brother (my uncle Jim) were digging a pit for the septic tank out back. Spencer had run away from home!

And who was Spencer? Oh, he was a friend of theirs, wild, jocular, and in love with the world (he'd died young in a motorcycle accident), but when he ran away Spencer's father came into the backyard, and threatened to beat the two of them within an inch of their lives if they didn't tell him where the boy had gone. My dad and his brother paused, confused, and refused to reveal their comrade's whereabouts, which didn't go over well.

Now my grandfather watched a number of Westerns: *Bonanza*, *Stagecoach*, John Ford and John Wayne, and when he heard the ruckus, he stepped from the back door and stood, watching. He was a small man, even in his prime, but he had *cojones* (English translation: balls), and he spoke two lines I'll always remember, whether they're truth or not:

"There's three of us," he said, "two shovels, and one ditch. Whodoyathink is gonna end up innit?"
And Clint Eastwood couldn't have delivered 'em any better if he had fifteen, or say a hundred and fifty takes. That's the kind of guy my grandfather was.