

## THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

## Original Names

## Changed Names

Henry Brandon

Jim Lea

George Brandon

Jerry Lea

Jerry Hampton

George Duclolt

Susan Harrison

Jane Carwell

Date of first writing:	
Name of person interviewed:	Henry Brandon (white)
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Name of writer:	George Anderson
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"Drinking one's self to death is an amusing, if tragic process. Now I'm the county's prize case. Mothers frequently call my name up as 'example horrible' when their boys first start hitting the bottle. I suppose they're right, for drinking, in a trite fashion, ruined me.

"Look at me, Jim Lea, son of Captain Jerry Lea that the U. D. C's make so much of. There was a Methodist preacher here once who said he could see every scene in 'Ten Nights in a Barroom' by just looking at me. He's the same one who said my face, no doubt, was the one on the barroom floor, an observation that revealed the essential ignorance of ministers in general.

"In addition, my lad, to the dubious distinction of being able to hold more liquor than any man in seven counties, I'm also the only man in these parts to hold a law degree from Harvard and a certificate from the

Sorbonne, neither of which have I put to any use. It is an unfortunate proposition to find one's self a drunkard under any circumstance, but my case has a rather amusing, if ironic, and perhaps tragic touch, running through it all. I have no desire to resist alcohol. I love to get drunk. A normal man needs a certain amount of filth, but I need infinitely more than the average man.

"Of course, I realize I'm a psychopathic case. They were getting sociology under way when I was studying at the Sorbonne under Le Conte, the man who first gave impetus to social investigations. Fittingly, I did my research on the Pathology of the Alcoholic.

"A man can go far in one lifetime. Consider my case for a moment. Tomorrow morning I shall go to the County Welfare Office and draw \$7. I do this twice a month. Of this seven, I shall invest three in whiskey. I have no monies, no income from any source; I am, in short, a poverty-ridden, degenerate son of an old and decayed South. I sleep in a packing box. My bed consists of cotton I filched from fields I once owned. Lacking utterly a sense of decency and pride, I beg cast-off clothing from people I knew under circumstances that were happier. My chief regret is not my poverty, but the dull fact that I cannot get enough money together to get very drunk---very, very, drunk and stay

that way until I die.

"Now the other colors in this charming life pattern of mine: At twenty-one, I inherited the estate my father and his father had taken a great deal of pains building up. As I recall it, there were seven plantations with a combined acreage of 11,000 acres; considerable town property, albeit General Lee did shoot it up considerably when he was standing against Grant. The late War of the Sections had devaluated my father's currency, but withal I came into \$45,000 in cash and around \$20,000 more in railroad shares.

"I was out of Harvard, a book-loving, scholarly sort of person who wanted to study all the time, and, of course, I had taken it for granted that I would take the 'grand tour' in Europe. And I decided that I would combine it with study in Paris.

"I vested powers of attorney in George Ducolt before sailing. George was to look after the plantings and ride herd on the railroad shares. And how he did," Jim's mouth twisted sourly.

"A year in Europe was enough, and my funds were running low. Couldn't hear anything from George on how the crops were going. I wrote a cousin that I would be in Paris for another year and sailed. It was a good thing I came back when I did, for I managed to save a couple plantations that George hadn't transferred to

himself. He never got any use out of them, but his widow enjoyed them and my railroad shares, too. That's the only time I was upset in my life. George looked odd, and even repentant when he begged me not to shoot. I can see the pleading in his face now when I pulled the trigger. Oh, the Jury let me off light. I wasn't drinking much then, and I was Captain Jerry Lea's son.

"Where I was born and a river plantation were left, and I decided to farm them. The first still stands; a rich Yankee bought it and restored it. It was piquantly beautiful. A mile-long twin avenue of cedars swept grandly up to the front and stopped almost apologetically just short of where the wistaria blooms over the boxwoods. About twenty years ago I got drunk and sold the boxwoods for \$400. They were resold the day later for \$6,000. You've seen the place so many times you know it well--that the stones were brought from England after the War of 1812.

"My farming operations didn't last long. I wasn't interested. My tenants rooked me out of my share of the crops, and all I wanted to do was go fox hunting and fishing.

"There was one position of honor I acquired, and almost my last contact with decency. The Convention elected me to the State Senate, not because of any particular talent of mine, but because I was the son of my father. That's probably the only thing that's kept me

out of jail and the poorhouse: I am the son of Captain Jerry Lea.

"Unfortunately the presiding officer of the Senate didn't assign me to the committees I wished, and consequently my legislative experience consisted of one long, lasting drinking bout. I stayed at home sick for two or three months after adjournment, getting over my legislative experience.

"Jane Carwell is the last pleasant memory. After getting on my feet, I knew I had to stay in the open to recover from 'duties' in the Senate. I had a grey charger I rode over the community. I loved to ride, and I still do. That is one of my regrets that I can't ride, can't stay on a horse--a matter of muscle-eye co-ordination that I lost quite a while ago.

"I was riding the bluff road when I saw her. Her mount shied from an overhanging branch, and she pulled hard on the rein--so hard it must have torn his mouth, for he neighed shrilly. That frightened her, and she sawed on the rein. Jane almost fell when the horse thundered down the road toward me. I shouted for him to stop. I rode hard behind them, for the horse was headed straight over the bluff. I came abreast of them, reached over, pulled her from the saddle as the horse plunged over the bluff.

"She was a frightened girl, so badly frightened that she didn't speak until I got her home, and I told



her I would come that night to see how she was getting along. I'd known Jane Carwell all my life, and of a sudden, I knew I'd loved her all the time. That night I told her. I can see her now.

"'No, Jim, you won't leave liquor alone.'"

"'I will,' I whispered, 'I plight you my word true.' And if she had lived, this would have been a different story." His dingy, unwashed hands shook.

"I didn't touch a drop, and I didn't even want one all the time she stayed with me. There's a paradise here on this earth, and she carried me there. I was happy and far-seeing. I secured good tenants for my farms. We were going to be married in a few months. And then she went away. Typhoid is quick and merciless. Nothing mattered after that, and there was the necessity of forgetting. I stayed in town for six months--drunk--in the gutter, I mean the gutter. I slept wherever I fell.

"My tenants made away with the crop money, I suppose. I never found out. It was two years before I knew all the buildings on the river farm were burned. I sold it then. I probably didn't get near its value. I didn't care then and don't now, for all there remains for me to do is to die.

"After four stupified years in town I went back to the homeplace. I nearly went crazy there the first week, for I had no whiskey and no money left to buy it

with, I thought. I drank a bottle of horse liniment and was almost dead when a Negro found me. He brought the doctor from town, and my father's lawyer came with him.

"'Jim,' the doctor said, 'if Ben hadn't found you, you would have been dead now. You're lucky to be alive. You've got \$26,000 left from your father's estate, and the executor wants to wash his hands of it.'

"I signed the release for him, and for two glorious years I went on a magnificent drunk. It cost me a little over \$1,000 a month, but Lawdy, it was worth it. I set up a bar and sent for a real bartender. No matter how much they wept about Captain Jerry's son being a rotter and going to the dogs, my moral-preaching friends would put their shoes on my brass rail and drink it down. In two years I didn't have a cent. My home was ruining, and my friends, my fine drinking friends, had all flown. 'Lea's folly' they called it, and the ladies would draw their skirts close when I went by for fear of contaminating themselves by my presence. I've always had a soft place in my heart for pariahs and Ishmaelites. They are really fine people.

"From now I regret to say my biography has but one theme, one prolonged incident. Nigger Ben, after raising me from the dead, took it upon himself to keep me alive. He and I stayed together, and I looked at



at the decaying walls and hingeless doors and saw my own rotten being and hingeless soul. Waiting for death should be a rationalized process. Without a sense of decency , a person soon loses the ability, the capacity to pretend. I don't know how to pretend; consequently, I can hardly be regarded as a happy person, enjoying the calm serenity of a productive, socially responsible life. I've produced nothing; I haven't had the slightest interest or intention of producing anything for thirty years.

"For fifteen years I didn't leave the place. I wrote three books, volumes for which I never found a publisher. My books, I'm afraid, were neither conventional or understandable, for there are so few people like me who spent about all his adult life in perpetual state of semi and even more advanced stages of alcoholism. But strange visions come to a man, and he hears strange voices.

"I would have been at home now, for even a Chinaman respects the graves of his ancestors, if Nigger Ben hadn't died. I stayed there for awhile, but I nearly starved to death. Then one day the president of the United Daughters of the Confederacy came out with a Yankee millionaire, and he offered me \$15,000 for the place. I took it.

"The Lost Cause, the bonnie blue flag and all

the rest of the tag ends kept me from starving to death from then on. The U. D. C. president and all the rest of the little U. D. C.'s appointed themselves my guardian and intrusted themselves with the guardianship of my \$15,000, which in an amazingly short time had shrunk to \$7,000. I purchased a very fine motor vehicle from the son of a man who rode with my father in the Southern Army. I found later that the car could be bought from any dealer, not a descendant of a Confederate soldier, for \$3,000 less than I paid out to that valiant son of a valiant father. A Southern gentlemen is a curious compound. For example, I'm one, even if I'm run-down at the heels. You can take it from me that a couple of industrious po' whites are a heck of a better community asset than a carload of U. D. C.'s and D. A. R.'s. Southern gentility, except in a few insulated cases, disappeared when Lincoln freed the slaves. A man, unfortunately, can't be a 'gentlemen' and do routine work in a routine world. That is one of my chief objections to things as they are--not enough dramatic situations.

"For fifteen years the Daughters doled me out enough to live on. Quite often they would come around, bring the monthly check, exhort me to lead a better life and remind me of brave and handsome Captain Jerry Lea who became more heroic and more knightly each time they came. It has always been something of a wonder to me

why General Lee was put in command of the Southern forces when my warlike sire was riding the bushes with Stuart.

"Those fifteen years were not altogether pleasant. My monthly stipend hardly permitted me to get roaring drunk, and I do love to get roaring drunk. Then, too, prohibition came to plague the land, and all these drinking years I've stayed aloof from bootleggers. Since drinking is my life, naturally I possess certain standards governing it. Bootlegging is as vicious an institution as the ABC stores are noble.

"The thin gray line has thinned to the point that it is imaginary, and the Daughters, they are thinning. I regret to say it, but the sterling qualities of Captain Jerry Lea, the warrior, have thinned too. They never mention it to me anymore. It may be due to the fact that all my money is gone, and the guardianship fee is all gone.  
to

"But I have little<sup>to</sup> to complain of. For as the Daughters thinned, the New Deal came in like a full moon. The chairman of the county executive committee offered to get me a WPA time-keeping job, but I didn't want it. I'd never worked, and it seemed so useless to begin and, anyway, I was entitled to an old-age pension. I'd much rather have that, and he arranged it.

"I doubt if I would drink as much as I used to if I had the wherewithal. Drinking in big doses would be a strain on a man, although all his vital organs are preserved

in alcohol. He must confess that he doesn't get the same joy he once got from getting roaring drunk. I like to tell myself it is poverty and not the itch lessened for liquor that is responsible for my semi-respectable state.

"When a man reaches my age, there isn't a lot he can do to amuse himself. Things grow dull when the liquor gives out, which it does with a distressing frequency. Here lately I've taken up atheism. In truth, I have no religious opinions, and man's relation with the infinite has never interested me. But atheism has given me a lot of comfort. God-fearing Christian people, who hitherto passed me by, go out of their way now to try to reform me. Recently the local Baptist minister drove me into a corner and tried to get me to repent of my heresies to the end that I would come to Jesus and become a child of God.

"What constantly amuses me is the unchristianity of so many Christians, and it is for their sake I have become an open atheist. I set myself up as constant reminder of sin in its visible form. In addition to having a capacity of self-analysis, I have a sense of humor. About that: a sense of humor is one of the worst things a man can have from a practical, money making standpoint. You laugh out of a thing, instead of working out of it.

"A man, I suppose, mellows with years. For now I like to sit and watch the curious wriggings of people

in a sugar-coated process of comfortable living. People who have the most sense usually have nothing else. They are intelligently, ponderously uninteresting.

"Observation of young people is the main compensating thing in this forced, and most of the time, unwelcome sobriety that came with my Government check. They are poised on the brink of something that they have practically no control of, and still others a little older, who, by fool luck and equally foolish labor, will shoot their mouths off that they are poised on the brink of opportunity. If I were capable of philosophic reflection, I would become sad about it all. I sincerely believe that the chief trouble with the world is the lack of enough people like me. Of course, not a broken down sot like me, but people who would be content to amble through life without worrying about amounting to anything. I certainly didn't, and I never wanted to, really. I've never accomplished anything, and I didn't try to. But so many people who want to amount to something and do something constructive never do, and it makes them bitter. They take it out on their children. That's the reason most of the young folks today are a bunch of neurotic unadjusted fools.

"You know, if I were capable of sustained work I would write a book on the observations of a drunkard. For you must admit that I am an extraordinary drunk, possessor of degrees from three of the best universities in the world,

and an author of books. If I wrote a fine book, and it would be a fine one, nobody would read it. Anyway, I'm old and worn out, and maybe my book would be old and worn out and shabby like me.

"Strangely enough, I have no illusions about this life I've led, and little disappointment over it. The death of the girl I would have married struck deep. Although I know myself full well, I don't know why I set out to drink a life away. It was not the death of the girl. She was the interrupting factor in a drinking career, a way-stop, not a turning point.

"I told you I studied under Le Conte when sociological studies were beginning to take form and setting definite areas of expression. We used to talk of the motivating power and influences of the inheritance and environmental factors. In my case, neither pointed the way I was headed. For on the inheritance side, I came of stocks of people who were leaders for generations. I was brought up in a gentle environment and was superlatively educated and trained, and then given, for the period, and unusually large estate.

"My life is fantastic, and, trying to find a reason for it all, I stumbled on to another favorite observation of mine. That is, of course, crime doesn't pay; but then neither does honesty. I've watched men, who were essentially honest, never make that honesty pay.

"Contemporary political problems, I mean the New



Deal, are so funny. That and my atheism are all that keep me alive. For the gyrations of this Administration, with its crackpot theorizing and its learned idiocy in its quest for the good life, is so funny. I'd like to stick around for another century to watch posterity work its pants off cleaning up the mess.

"I have opinions on everything under the sun. I'm firmly convinced, if it was practical in the short run, that progress is a bad thing and ought to be prevented. Mind you, in the short run, for say what you please, the human animal has, no matter how much he piously bleats, no historical perspective, and he conditions his actions on the things he can reach out and touch.

"Certainly, I believe in birth control. I think posterity is one of the most embarrassing things in the world, and we ought to do all we could to stop it completely."

"Although I'm an aristocrat of the worst sort, I'm against it. I've known some very fine people who could have amounted to something if they had wanted to; couldn't because they had too much background. Background is fine stuff, but what a man really ought to have is a lot of foreground. When you get foreground and background hitched up together then you really got something you can use. If you just got a lot of one of them, you're in bad shape."