

# The Columbus Dispatch

ENTERTAINMENT

## Joe Blundo commentary: He survived Dogpatch, thanks to Maw Maw



By Joe Blundo, The Columbus Dispatch  
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Clemon Hodge grew up on Little Avenue in a pocket of Franklin Township, just west of Green Lawn Cemetery, that some people called Dogpatch (no doubt inspired by the ramshackle neighborhood in the old comic strip Li'l Abner). Dogpatch is also the title of his memoir, a slim, self-published book of memories both searing and sentimental.

Some scenes from the childhood of Clemon Hodge:

- Amusing himself at night by using a BB gun to shoot the rats that invaded his grandparents' house.
- Eating sandwiches with bacon grease and sugar.
- Stepping barefoot into warm road tar that, after it hardened, became the only pair of shoes he wore all summer.

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Dogpatch is also the title of his memoir, a slim, self-published book of memories both searing and sentimental. (It's available for \$20.92 at [www.clemonhodge.com](http://www.clemonhodge.com).)

Hodge, a retired counselor living in Linworth, was born to a 15-year-old girl -- who would occasionally reappear in his life, usually on the back of a motorcycle driven by her latest boyfriend. Relatives disparaged his father, saying he was a musician who played the honky-tonk bars on Parsons Avenue for "a bellyful of beer and hat full of change."

But little Clem had his grandmother, and she made all the difference.

Katie Harless and her husband, Harry, had 14 children and helped raise Clem and six

other grandchildren. Their house, long since demolished, had holes in the walls (hence the rat problem), and the neighborhood was an often-violent place. But they managed to instill in Hodge a sense of right and wrong.

“They may have been poor, but they were far from spiritually broke,” he said.

I took a ride with Hodge, 74, through the old neighborhood. He showed me the stone church on Brown Road where he and Maw Maw, as he called his grandmother, attended two services on Sundays and one on Wednesdays.

We drove the streets -- dirt roads when Hodge lived there -- that seemed always to be overrun by mutts. (“The dogs had the best teeth in the neighborhood,” he notes in the book.)

We paused at the site of the house where, when Hodge was 12, he found his grandmother dead of an unknown medical catastrophe.

After that, his life got harder. He went to live with his father, whose violent outbursts prompted Hodge to leave at about 15 and never return.

Hodge, who is married and has five children, battled alcoholism in early adulthood but eventually completed college and established a career.

He still visits Dogpatch now and then, if only to remember the person he credits most with protecting him from its rough edges.

“Had it not been for my grandmother’s love, I don’t know what would have happened. That’s still there. That’s a part of who I am.”

Joe Blundo is a Dispatch columnist.

jblundo@dispatch.com

@joemblundo