

Perry Como: Seventh Son of a Seventh Son on Seventh Street

Written by Terry Smith

Perry Como was the seventh son of a seventh son, a sign of good luck in Italian families, but it was my uncle who had the good fortune of meeting him on 7th Street in Lorain, Ohio, back in the 1930s, just as Como's six decades of singing began and before his records sold more than 100 million copies.

I became a fan of Perry Como a few years ago when I started listening to music of his ilk and era. Although I still like Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin for their unique styles, I have a greater affection for Como. This is due in part to the fact I think his personal life was more exemplary and that this was evident in his singing. I also have somewhat of a personal connection to him.

My family had always mentioned that Perry Como had been to my Grandma Smith's house in Lorain. There was rumor that he even took a nap on the couch. This didn't seem far-fetched, especially considering Eugene Levy's somewhat recent [Second City TV sketch](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1yvS_m_7eE "Got To Boogie") about Mr. C being Mr. Casual. To get the truth, I wrote to my uncle, James Smith, now 97 and living in San Diego. Uncle Jim is quite a musician himself ([here](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohBGMTiJyfA&feature=youtu.be) he is on the banjo at his 95th birthday party), is in great health, and was happy to share with me his memories of Como's visit. I got his approval for me to share the following letter.

In regard to the letter, here's a little background information. My father, Bob Smith was an insurance agent and one of five sons of Tom and Ella Smith, who lived on 7th Street in Lorain, Ohio. My dad's brother Len, mentioned in the letter, went on to become a doctor in Lorain and played piano in a number of local bands and orchestras. Uncle Jim was an accountant with the IRS before his retirement 40 years ago (yes, 40!). The two other brothers, Frank and John, became Jesuit priests, Frank taking his talents to John Carroll University as an English Literature professor (now retired), and John taking his to his mission in India until he died there in 2000.

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45.8pt 91.6pt 137.4pt 183.2pt 229.0pt 274.8pt 320.6pt 366.4pt 412.2pt 458.0pt 503.8pt 549.6pt 595.4pt 641.2pt 687.0pt 732.8pt;">Dear Terry: </p> <p class="MsoNormal" style="line-height: 15.6pt; margin: 0in 12pt 6pt; tab-stops: 45.8pt 91.6pt 137.4pt 183.2pt 229.0pt 274.8pt 320.6pt 366.4pt 412.2pt 458.0pt 503.8pt 549.6pt 595.4pt 641.2pt 687.0pt 732.8pt;">You inquired regarding my experience with Perry Como. I wish that I could fill in your various questions about him. However, here is what I experienced:</p> <p class="MsoNormal" style="line-height: 15.6pt; margin: 6pt 12pt; tab-stops: 45.8pt 91.6pt 137.4pt 183.2pt 229.0pt 274.8pt 320.6pt 366.4pt 412.2pt 458.0pt 503.8pt 549.6pt 595.4pt 641.2pt 687.0pt 732.8pt;">On the evening that we met, Len and the Jack Sullivan Orchestra were practicing at our home at 1164 7th Street in Lorain. It so happened that the president of the Cleveland Musicians Union also lived on our street. For some reason, the Freddie Carlone Orchestra needed to talk with the union president. He was not home I guess, but I suppose his wife told him to come to our house and someone could direct him to the TB Sanatorium, which was outside the city. He was out there probably on a gig or something. I was designated to ride with Freddie Carlone in his car. On the way to the Sanatorium we stopped for gas, and it was then that Perry, who was sitting in the front seat, got out to stretch. When he got out of the car, Freddie Carlone said to me about Perry Como, "He is a great vocalist," or words to that effect. That is pretty much the story. Later, when I thought back about my chance meeting with the ♦Great Vocalist,♦ it was a thrill to see him become more and more popular over the years.</p> <p class="MsoNormal" style="line-height: 15.6pt; margin: 6pt 12pt; tab-stops: 45.8pt 91.6pt 137.4pt 183.2pt 229.0pt 274.8pt 320.6pt 366.4pt 412.2pt 458.0pt 503.8pt 549.6pt 595.4pt 641.2pt 687.0pt 732.8pt;">I would imagine that the meeting took place in the late '30's, so I was not married at that time, and neither was Len. I might add that Freddie Carlone was a favorite big band in the Cleveland area, and was on radio often; I don't recall what Perry sang or sounded like at that time, but I can imagine that his voice was "there" until he went higher in the music world.</p> <p class="MsoNormal" style="line-height: 15.6pt; margin: 6pt 12pt; tab-stops: 45.8pt 91.6pt 137.4pt 183.2pt 229.0pt 274.8pt 320.6pt 366.4pt 412.2pt 458.0pt 503.8pt 549.6pt 595.4pt 641.2pt 687.0pt 732.8pt;">Like you, and millions of others, we all thought his voice was the greatest. Hope that my brief meeting and the account thereof will be of assistance to you.</p> <p class="MsoNormal" style="line-height: 15.6pt; margin: 6pt 12pt; tab-stops: 45.8pt 91.6pt 137.4pt 183.2pt 229.0pt 274.8pt 320.6pt 366.4pt 412.2pt 458.0pt 503.8pt 549.6pt 595.4pt 641.2pt 687.0pt 732.8pt;">Thanks for keeping in touch.</p> <p class="MsoNormal" style="line-height: 15.6pt; margin: 6pt 12pt; tab-stops: 45.8pt 91.6pt 137.4pt 183.2pt 229.0pt 274.8pt 320.6pt 366.4pt 412.2pt 458.0pt 503.8pt 549.6pt 595.4pt 641.2pt 687.0pt 732.8pt;">Thanks for keeping in touch.</p>

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tsmith@actingbuff.com </p>