

My German-speaking maternal grandfather, Jozsef Guth, immigrated to the United States from Hungary in 1912. He was 21 years old and had trained as a butcher in his native land. When the captain of the wooden ship on which he was traveling learned of my grandfather's trade the captain offered him employment on the voyage. As grandpop always told it, "der butcher var drunk; he don't showed up!"

In New York City grandpop was reunited with his childhood sweetheart Julianna PohlmueLLer who had arrived the year before. After they married they traveled to Allentown, Pennsylvania, where Jozsef's fellow-apprentice Louie Laszlo had recently settled. It was there that grandpop established his first business. In addition to maintaining a retail butcher shop, grandpop (now known as Joseph Guth) made home deliveries from his horse-drawn wagon.



Joseph Guth, Butcher

Joseph and Julianna eventually had three children, Joseph, Jr., Helena, and Kunigunde, my mother.

By the time my mother was old enough to help in the family business grandpop routinely sent her out into the immediate neighborhood to deliver cuts of meat to customers. On one memorable occasion my mother was dispatched to a wealthy neighbor who invited her into her home. When my mother stepped onto the thick and richly colored oriental rug she was

enthralled. She had never seen such luxury and beauty. Right then she decided that one day she would own such a rug.

Eventually my grandparents moved to Philadelphia. It was there, when my mother was nineteen years old, that she met and married my father, Lawton Howard, a native of Ocracoke Island. He had left home when he was just sixteen years old, and, like so many of his island peers, secured a job with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, working on dredges and tugboats on the Delaware River.

After my dad's retirement in 1966 my parents moved back to Ocracoke where they immersed themselves in the community and enjoyed fishing from my dad's hand-built wooden skiff. Around 1977 my dad purchased a new outboard motor for his boat.

In that same year Sam Jones, wealthy entrepreneur and businessman, died. Sam, a native of Swan Quarter, North Carolina, had married Mary Ruth Kelly, granddaughter of Capt. George Gregory Howard of Ocracoke Island. Sam was the owner of Berkley Machine Works in Norfolk, Virginia. On the shore of Lake Lawson, Virginia Beach, he built a 14,500 sq' 30-room brick mansion, which housed much of his art collection, including paintings, Victorian antiques, Art Deco furnishings, Persian rugs, rare books, and custom-built furniture. Sam also built several large structures on Ocracoke, including the present-day Castle Bed and Breakfast and Berkley Manor. These were furnished with valuable antiques and numerous Persian rugs.

After Sam's death his family offered many of his island furnishings for sale. Interested buyers were invited to tour Berkley Castle to view the items. When my mother learned that Persian rugs were for sale she immediately decided she wanted to see them. After all, she thought, her husband had just bought an expensive outboard motor; maybe she would splurge and get a Persian rug. When she arrived at the Castle in her signature cotton house dress (with two large patch pockets) Sam's son-in-law dutifully led her from room to room to peruse the rugs although he was convinced she was an extremely unlikely buyer. At the end of the tour my mother asked to return to one of the upper rooms. She pointed to the 10' X 12' "Hunting Scene Rug" there, and inquired, "How much is that one?" On being told the price was \$1,000 she reached into her pocket, retrieved \$500 cash, handed it to Sam's son-in-law, and announced that she would be back momentarily with the remainder of the money.

The hunting scene rug design is an ancient weaving style originally produced for royalty and nobility. It is no ordinary rug, but an exquisite piece of art that tells a story. For several years the rug graced my parents' modest island living room, but, because my mother found

the fringes difficult to keep straight and tidy, she eventually gifted it to me. When I restored my grandparents' 150-year-old, 1,100 sq' Ocracoke cottage I placed the rug in my living room.

On Friday morning, September 6, 2019, as Hurricane Dorian was churning the waters of the Atlantic Ocean off our coast and whipping up winds near 100 mph, a neighbor sent me a text: "The tide is coming up in our yard!" I opened my front door and looked down the lane directly across from my house. In a matter of minutes tidewater came rushing down the lane. It looked like a small river. Almost as quickly, rushing water came from the right and the left. As water rose ever higher on my fence I sensed the coming catastrophe. When the tide breached the top points of my picket fence I knew it would be only a matter of seconds. Water cascaded onto my porch. I shut the door and used towels to help keep the tide from pouring under the door. It didn't help. Water flowed into my first floor and bubbled up between the old floor boards

I stepped back onto the Persian rug. It was floating.

The tidewater receded almost as quickly as it came in. But the damage was done. Insulation under my floors and in my walls was soaking wet. Several of my electric outlets were submerged. My washer, dryer, and refrigerator were destroyed.

I looked at my Persian rug, wondering if it could ever be salvaged. It was saturated with sea water, and it began to smell after just a couple of days. But it was too heavy to carry out of the house. Even four strong men were unable to lift it. After several days I developed a plan. We were able to fold the rug into a manageable size, about 32" wide. I tied it up and cinched a sturdy strap around the bundle. To that I tied a strong length of rope which I attached to my pickup truck which was in the lane directly across from my front door. With a little bit of amateur engineering skill we were able to pull the rug onto the porch and manipulate it over the railing so it could dry out.

That is where the rug stayed for about a week. My living room floor now had a chance to dry out, but I still despaired about saving the rug. How could I rinse it, clean it, and dry it? I didn't have the space, the equipment, or the expertise to clean and restore this beautiful Persian rug. And I didn't have any way to transport the rug to a professional cleaner. I didn't even know where I could take it, and Ocracoke is almost three hours by ferry just to the mainland. Besides, both of my vehicles had been flooded.

That's when Heather and Hilman Hicks, and their daughter Abby, showed up. They are frequent visitors to Ocracoke. They love island history, have participated in our Ghost and

History Walking Tours of the village, and have purchased several items from our craft gallery, Village Craftsmen. They were on the island as volunteers with the faith-based group Samaritan's Purse. When they saw and heard the story of the Persian rug...its rarity, its beauty, its provenance...they decided they had to help.

With the assistance of Samaritan's Purse volunteer, Curt Wall, and other helpers, Heather and Hilman were able to wrestle the now almost dry rug off the porch, and into the bed of their waiting pickup truck. From there it was transported to the ferry line where an islander in another pickup agreed to take it onto the boat. In Swan Quarter, where Curt had left his vehicle, the Persian rug was transferred to his pickup truck for the ride to [Pettyjohn's Professional Rug Care](#) in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

Below are several photos of the rug-cleaning process:









Not quite two weeks later Heather and Hilman (above) brought the rug back...drier, cleaner, brighter, and lighter than it had been in decades.



Hunting Scene Persian Rug

According to Katie Pettyjohn Reuther, the rug “lost [about] 90 pounds (of sand and shells) while it was on vacation!” Pettyjohn’s workers said they had never seen a rug with fragments of oyster shells embedded in the fabric.

Heartfelt thanks are in order to Heather and Hilman Hicks, Curt Wall, all of the other volunteers with Samaritan’s Purse, and the fine folks at Pettyjohn’s for their skill and professional handling of my hunting scene Persian rug which once again graces my living room floor.