The Blue People of Troublesome Creek

- Martin Fugate was a French orphan who emigrated to Kentucky in 1820 to claim a land grant on the wilderness banks of Troublesome Creek. No mention of his skin color is made in the early histories of the area, but family lore has it that Martin himself was blue.

- The odds against it were incalculable, but Martin Fugate managed to find and marry a woman who carried the same recessive gene. Elizabeth Smith, apparently, was as pale-skinned as the mountain laurel that blooms every spring around the creek hollows.

- Martin and Elizabeth set up housekeeping on the banks of Troublesome and began a family. Of their seven children, four were reported to be blue.

- The clan kept multiplying. Fugates married other Fugates. Sometimes they married first cousins. And they married the people who lived closest to them, the Combses, Smiths, Ritchies, and Stacys. All lived in isolation from the world, bunched in log cabins up and down the hollows, and so it was only natural that a boy married the girl next door, even if she had the same last name.

- "When they settled this country back then, there was no roads. It was hard to get out, so they intermarried," says Dennis Stacy, a 51-year-old coal miner and amateur genealogist who has filled a loose-leaf notebook with the laboriously traced blood lines of several local families.

- Stacy counts Fugate blood in his own veins. "If you'll notice," he observes, tracing lines on his family's chart, which lists his mother's and his father's great grandfather as Henley Fugate, "I'm kin to myself."

- The railroad didn't come through eastern Kentucky until the coal mines were developed around 1912, and it took another 30 or 40 years to lay down roads along the local creeks.

- Martin and Elizabeth Fugate's blue children multiplied in this natural isolation tank. The marriage of one of their blue boys, Zachariah, to his mother's sister triggered the line of succession that would result in the birth, more than 100 years later, of Benjy Stacy.

- When Benjy was born with purple skin, his relatives told the perplexed doctors about his great grandmother Luna Fugate. One relative describes her as "blue all over," and another calls Luna "the bluest woman I ever saw."

- Luna's father, Levy Fugate, was one of Zachariah Fugate's sons. Levy married a Ritchie girl and bought 200 acres of rolling land along Ball Creek. The couple had eight children, including Luna.
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- A fellow by the name of John E. Stacy spotted Luna at Sunday services of the Old Regular Baptist Church back before the century turned. Stacy courted her, married her, and moved over from Troublesome Creek to make a living in timber on her daddy's land.
- Luna has been dead nearly 20 years now, but her widower survives. John Stacy still lives on Lick Branch of Ball Creek. {His two room log cabin sits in the middle of Laurel Fork Hollow. Luna is buried at the top of the hollow. Stacy's son has built a modern house next door, but the old logger won't hear of leaving the cabin he built with timber he personally cut and hewed for Luna and their 13 children.
- Stacy recalls that his father-in-law, Levy Fugate, was "part of the family that showed blue. All them old fellers way back then was blue. One of 'em I remember seeing him when I was just a boy Blue Anze, they called him. Most of them old people went by that name the blue Fugates. It run in that generation who lived up and down Ball [Creek]."
- "They looked like anybody else, 'cept they had the blue color," Stacy says, sitting in a chair in his plaid flannel shirt and suspenders, next to a cardboard box where a small black piglet, kept as a pet, is squealing for his bottle. "I couldn't tell you what caused it."
- The only thing Stacy can't or won't remember is that his wife Luna was blue. When asked about it, he shakes his head and stares steadfastly ahead. It would be hard to doubt this gracious man except that you can't find another person who knew Luna who doesn't remember her as being blue.
- "The bluest Fugates I ever saw was Luna and her kin," says Carrie Lee Kilburn, a nurse who works at the rural medical center called Homeplace Clinic. "Luna was bluish all over. Her lips were as dark as a bruise. She was as blue a woman as I ever saw."
- Luna Stacy possessed the good health common to the blue people, bearing at least 13 children before she died at 84. {The clinic doctors only saw her a few times in her life and never for anything serious.
- As coal mining and the railroads brought progress to Kentucky, the blue Fugates started moving out of their communities and marrying other people. The strain of inherited blue began to disappear as the recessive gene spread to families where it was unlikely to be paired with a similar gene.
- Benjy Stacy is one of the last of the blue Fugates. {With Fugate blood on both his mother's and his father's side, the boy could have received genes for the enzyme deficiency from either direction.} Because the boy was intensely blue at birth but then recovered his normal skin tones,
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Benjy is assumed to have inherited only one gene for the condition. {Such people tend to be very blue only at birth, probably because newborns normally have smaller amounts of diaphorase. The enzyme eventually builds to normal levels in most children and to almost normal levels in those like Benjy, who carry one gene.}

- Hilda Stacy is fiercely protective of her son. {She gets upset at all the talk of inbreeding among the Fugates. One of the supermarket tabloids once sent a reporter to find out about the blue people, and she was distressed with his preoccupation with intermarriages.}
- She and her husband Alva have a strong sense of family. {They sing in the Stacy Family Gospel Band and have provided their children with a beautiful home and a menagerie of pets, including horses.}
- "Everyone around here knows about the blue Fugates," says Hilda Stacy who, at 26, looks more like a sister than a mother to her children. "It's common. It's nothing."