

Cuthbert Gully

Greetings, Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Cuthbert Gully and if you've noticed the English accent, it is because I was born in Quebec to English parents. We moved back to the mother country, before I ventured out to find my true home here in Corona, at the tender age of 16.

I am here before you today because I have been a fighter. I come, in fact, from a line of men who spent a part of their careers as fighters.

My grandfather, John Gully, was renowned for his fighting abilities, as it happens. Though not in wars. Grandfather did not come from a high station in life - he inherited a butcher shop, which lost money. His fortunes changed, however, when things looked darkest - he could not pay his creditors and was sent to debtor's prison. But a friend who was a well-known bare-knuckled boxer visited him there and they staged an informal match - the proceeds were enough to settle his debts. Several other fights were arranged - one with the reigning champion who only beat him in the 59th round. With the money he earned from fighting, he bought a tavern and took up horse racing. He lost 40,000 pounds on one race and made 85,000 on another. Grandfather won the Derby with horses he co-owned twice. He became a Member of Parliament for five years. All of this, while producing a family of 24 children, with his first and second wives.

My father was also a fighter.

Captain Henry Lawrence Gully became a commander in the English navy - he was the youngest commander in service at the time of his retirement at just 27. My father then became a civil engineer, living in Florida and Quebec for a time, before returning to oversee his property and his coal mines in England. My mother bore him 9 children.

I, like my father and grandfather before me, have been a fighter. But I didn't begin that way.

I learned civil engineering from my father, so that when I came to Corona at 16, I went to work immediately as an engineer with the San Jacinto Land Company.

My fighting didn't begin for four more years, when at the age of 20 I took up arms for my adopted country in the Spanish American War.

The war only lasted 4 months, and I returned to my life as an engineer, back to my old job, before also working in Los Angeles, San Pedro, and Long Beach, where I helped to reclaim 3,000 acres of land. I married my wife, Edna Sovereign, in Long Beach. We had a son, Henry, and two daughters - Edna, Jr. and Florence. We lost Edna, Jr. - we called her Adelia - to scarlet fever in 1911 when she was 6.

But before that sad day came, my family and I had become very much engaged in the social scene here in Corona. I had been appointed Corona's City Engineer in 1906. Over the years I would

become president of the local Rotary Club, a commander of American Legion Post 216, and the host of many a tea party and formal dinner at my house at 1321 South Main Street.

But let's get back to the fighting. Because unlike my father and grandfather, I would return to using my fists a second time.

In 1914, I joined the army and worked in the engineering department near the first line trenches in France in The Great War. I somehow survived five years in that horrific conflict to make it back to Corona at the age of 35. I rose in the ranks to captain, and when I returned to Corona, that was how I was henceforth addressed - as Captain Gully.

I was assistant county engineer until 1921, and then became chief engineer for Rex Clark, the owner of the North Corona Land Company, who was in the process of building and selling his "Nor-Co." For the next 2 years, I traveled all over Norco upgrading the water system, installing new pumps, lines and reservoirs.

I drove a convertible Maxwell roadster, but my dress was rather more old fashioned. I fancy I looked rather like the hero of our Spanish American War, Teddy Roosevelt, with my hat, handlebar moustache, riding breeches and knee high boots, as I strode through the mud with my surveying equipment!

I was often a sight for sore eyes. Or perhaps I should say thirsty mouths. Things were a bit primitive back then, I'm afraid. Water in Norco came from a reservoir where we depended on gravity to push it up through the faucets. People swam and fished in these reservoirs, and the water tasted pretty dreadful - especially if you happened to drink it on a day when a frog or guppy managed to find it's way out of your faucet and into your cup. I helped to change things.

I also played a big part in laying out the Norconian Resort, which put Norco on the map in the years just before the Depression put an end to such amusement parks for adults.

I was also a consultant for Corona's storm drains, so if you've been having trouble with drainage - well, I'm quite pleased to no longer be the individual to whom you should file your complaints!

I did find it interesting, however, to be contacted in 1956 after my retirement by Norco's Board of Directors because it turned out I was the only one around who knew anything about Norco's pipes prior to 1945! The community-owned Orange Heights Water Company insisted upon an appraisal before taking over, that only I could deliver - like the age, size and gage of the pipe. I had to write to all of their members promising that my appraisal would be free of charge, before they would let me help out Norco's citizens.

Then as soon as I managed to get permission, I came down sick - they actually had a newspaper article all about it, water is very important to a community and people wanted to know what the hold up was - and it was me! But that was in 1956 - I still had a few years left to be of service to my community.

I died 5 days short of my 85th birthday - almost a decade after my wife. The newspaper called me a pioneer of Corona and Norco. And so I was.

But like my ancestors before me, I was also a fighter.