I wish I had gotten to know her better. She was an integral part of our family until 1982, when she passed away at the age of 82. She lived a mere mile away from the house in Germantown that we lived in until 1965; Mom visited her almost daily and, if school was not in session, Mom usually look me along. When we moved to New Jersey, she visited us almost every weekend, taking the train from her apartment in Glenside to Reading Station in downtown Philly. She would then drive home with Dad once the store closed around 5:30. For most of the final twelve years of her life she spent more time at our house in Cherry Hill than Glenside, helping my beleaguered mother with household chores and with the care of my brain-damaged sister. She was Anne Curran Moffet, preferably known as Nan until I renamed her as Aunt Bea in the late 1960s due to her resemblance to a character in the *Andy Griffith Show*. And Aunt Bea she remained until the end of her life. Mom was the only one who did not call her by that name. For her, Aunt Bea would always be "Mother."

Frances Bavier as Aunt Bea

In hindsight, I'm not sure that the fictional character "Aunt Bea" did my grandmother justice. Sure, both women were short (about 5 feet) and had a matronly corpulence. Compare this one photo of "Aunt Bea" with the three showing my grandmother in 1953 and 1957:

The similarities actually end there. The fictional Aunt Bea was a rather self-effacing, gracious, deferential woman who strove to please family and guests with her Southern culinary skills. She even said things like "Oh, bother!" and "Oh, Flibbertigibbert!". My grandmother was a self-assured, strong-willed, feisty, and opinionated woman who did not accept "guff" from anybody, including "mahoffs." This is why I now think that she bore a much more tenable resemblance—physically as well as temperamentally—with Daphne Pollard, Oliver Hardy's wife in the hilarious flick *Thicker than Water* (1935). If you really want to see what Nan—my grandmother's preferred name—was like in person, I urge you to see this movie. Daphne gets so angry at Oliver for mismanaging their bank account that she hits him over the head with a frying pan, causing a lengthy hospitalization. I remember Mom telling me about one of Nan's favorite methods of punishing her children: grabbing them by an ear and banging their head into a wall, at least

once (twice for major infractions). The below photos from the movie capture Ms Hardy's and Nan's demeanor well. I'd say that Nan remained such a head-strong person until she started to decline mentally in the mid 1970s.



It would be unfair of me to leave you with this sole impression. Nan was also a compassionate person who could be very empathetic if you were hurting physically, especially during illnesses. I'm not sure Mom would have survived Cindy's tragedy as well as she did if Nan had not be an ever-present confidant, helping Mom untangle all the horrible conflicts of guilt and blame raging for years through her heart and mind.

Nan did not show her softer side to us all too frequently (not to me, at least). Birds, however, were an entirely different matter. Among my earliest vivid memories are seeing her cut up bread crusts left over from my peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches and gently tossing them outside her kitchen window on McMahon Avenue. She would get momentarily lost watching the birds pick at the goodies and then fly off. If there were no crusts available, she would take the two ends of a loaf of bread—the pieces that we always left untouched—and cut them up into bird-size bits. It didn't matter whether she was on McMahon Avenue, on East Price Street, on Saddle Lane, on Easton Road, or at Strawbridge Lake in Moorestown: she always loved feeding birds of any size and color, and then watching them enjoy their unexpected treats. I remember that she had a canary in her living room for several years and loved listening to the bird sing pretty melodies.

I'm sure than Nan was single-handedly responsible for getting me my first pet, the canary I named Chirp. As a seven- or eight-year-old I was neither mature or responsible enough to take care of the bird, but it was usually Nan who cleaned out the cage and inserted food sticks. She was also the person who broke the news to me that Chirp had died after a few months, and who consoled me as I wept bitterly upon receiving the news. A few weeks later she got me another canary, but it wasn't Chirp, and I had no interest in even naming the bird. Nan ended up taking care of it whenever she came over for a visit.

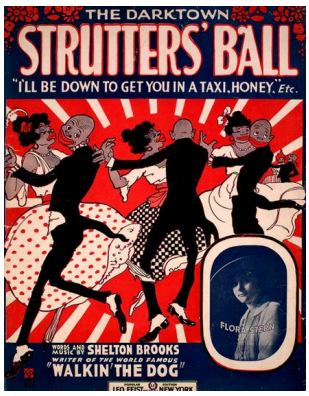
Nan's love of birds was matched by her love of crossword puzzles. I can see her sitting on the couch in her house on McMahon Avenue, and at the kitchen table in our house in Cherry Hill, pencil in hand, scratching away at the grid of small squares before her. She worked on crossword puzzles until she started to decline mentally in her mid-70s. When I was 10 I followed

her lead by working on the puzzles in the Daily News: she coached me through the solutions, pointing out that a "tern" and an "ern" are synonyms for a "seagull" and helping me figure out first and last names of famous actors and personalities. Mom had no interest whatsoever in doing crossword puzzles, yet humored Nan whenever she asked for the section of the newspaper in which the puzzles could be found.

Mom also had no desire whatsoever to play any kind of Board game with us. Nan felt otherwise. She gladly played board games like *Trouble!*, *Parchesi*, *Password*, and *Concentration* with us—we never had to ask her twice—and she even liked card games like *Old Maid*, *Rummy,* and *War*. Most of all, though, she loved playing *Monopoly,* a game that she had been playing since it was first issued in the 1930s. Nan always wanted to be the iron, and no one objected. She played frequently with me, Bob, and Neil, and I think we even got a few games in with Steve once he was old enough to understand the rules and Nan was still not showing signs of dementia. In the late 1960s Bob, Neil, and I began highly playing competitive games of *Monopoly*, inventing rules that allowed for unlimited hotels on any property, non-binding mergers with other players, and no point at which the game would finally end. We even kept a book of who owned what so that we could continue playing the same game for months on end. No joke! I found the actual Nichols notebook with the detailed information when we finally sold our parental home. Our final recorded game had gone on for over seven months!

To make the game extraordinarily competitive and to ensure games that moved along quickly, we initiated the "ten second rule." If you did not roll the dice within ten seconds, you lost your turn. If you did not complete all your transactions within ten seconds, your turn was automatically over. I mention this because Nan still played *Monopoly* with us even though she did not like this rule at all and would at times becomes exasperated. After all, in her late 60s she found it increasingly difficult to process information so quickly, especially with three grandchildren eagerly awaiting to capitalize on the slightest mistake on her part.

Nan loved the game shows that usually aired on weekday afternoons and early evenings. I do not think she ever missed a single game of Password, Concentration, or Jeopardy. The game itself was riveting, but she also found the hosts Alan Ludden, Hugh Downs, and Art Fleming attractive. Thanks largely to Nan's recommendations, either for Christmas or for birthdays, Mom and Dad bought me each of these games which I played frequently with Bob or Nan.



Nan had a special love for music. As far back as I can remember she played the piano spiritedly, occasionally singing the lyrics with a pleasant voice. She had a delicate touch and always had her wrists positioned correctly—techniques that suggested she received some kind of formal training. Most of the songs she played were hits from her youth. During my childhood the song she played most frequently was *Darktown Strutters' Ball.* She rarely played this song in her 70s and 80s, but whenever I asked her to do so, she could play it from memory with a great amount of verve. Her repertoire

included songs written by Jimmy McHugh and Richard Rodgers as well as a few hits from Broadway musicals. She continued playing daily until she passed away, although in her waning years the only song she tended to play was *Please Release Me.* In hindsight I do not recall her playing this song until she got into her late 70s. I have to wonder: was this a subtle message that she was patiently awaiting her death? Was she looking for the ultimate release from life? I'm inclined to answer these questions affirmatively. In her 70s and 80s Nan was wasting away, physically. At dinner time we all noticed that the food on her plate would disappear rather quickly. Most of it was not finding its way to her mouth; she would discretely drop it into napkins she had set on her lap. In other words, it always looked like she had eaten a full meal, but in reality she had merely nibbled. However, she always seemed to enjoy whatever Mom offered for dessert. After the dinner table was cleaned up we would usually find a small stack of napkins in the trashcan—napkins that were wrapped around bits of meat, potatoes, and vegetables. The older she got, the thicker these wadded-up napkins became.

One thing that Nan loathed was any kind of alcohol. She never drank, her husband never drank, and none of her kids ended up acquiring a taste for the stuff. As much as she idolized John F Kennedy—she kept a framed picture of the president in her room until she died—she griped about his habit of drinking a glass of beer with his meals, and she was dismayed, if not angry, when she heard that I started drinking beer during my Fulbright year in Germany. She had unkind things to say about actors and athletes who were reputed to have imbibed liquor—rumors that she picked up through reading *TV Guide* or newspapers like *National Enquirer*. I assume she had such a visceral hatred of alcohol because her father was an alcoholic. I never met the man, but I remember Mom telling me on several occasions that as an Irishman he had a taste for beer but could not hold his liquor. He allegedly had a history of beating his wife Bridget whenever he was inebriated. She grudgingly tolerated his drinking, perhaps because at that time women were not supposed to challenge patriarchal authority.

Snapshots: things I heard or saw

- Every so often my Dad would get free movie tickets from the man who rented office space in his store. Mr Munzer was a gem dealer whose brother worked as a free-lance movie critic. I remember Nan taking me to see several flicks at a theater in downtown Philadelphia: *Song of the South*; *Dumbo*; *Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962); *Mary Poppins* (1963), *None But the Brave* (1965), *Nevada Smith* (1966).

- Unlike my parents, Nan had some interest in baseball, the sport that I fell in love with in 1961. Occasionally she would tell me stories about Connie Mack, Robin Roberts, Richie Ashburn, and the Whiz Kids. She also helped me understand why certain things happened on the basepaths as I watched my first few baseball games on tv. I was curious why the Giants star WillieMcCovey had an Irish last name. Nan gave me a mini-lesson on the practice of slavery, claiming that one of Willie's ancestors likely worked on a plantation owned by an Irishman and was forced to adopt that last name.

- As much as Nan loved birds, she loathed ants. For whatever reason ants seemed to be a frequent pest at McMahon Avenue, marching from the small backyard into the kitchen. Nan's solution? Fill a tea kettle with water, bring it to a boil on the stove, walk outside and dump the water all along the lie of the ant's procession. It seemed to keep them from launching another invasion for another week, but they always managed to come back.

- Nan's husband died in 1957. His death was unanticipated. I believe that he fell victim to congestive heart failure. I remember being whisked by Mom over to McMahon Avenue. Nan was wailing and inconsolable. Mom tried to offer solace, but she too was overcome with grief. Both of them cursed the family physician for misdiagnosing my grandfather's condition. Mom, in particular, was keen on suing for malpractice. She was convinced that the doctor had refused to prescribe medications that would have helped her father; Dad persuaded her not to pursue this litigation. I believe that this incident was largely responsible for Mom's and Nan's life-long aversion to doctors.

- Although Nan was a died-in-the-wool Rooseveltian Democrat, she had a blind spot when it came to race relations. I think part of this was her need to carve out for her and her family a space in the socio-economic hierarchy that would confer on them a heightened sense of respectability. She was proud that she was not (any more?) associated with the "shanty Irish". She (and Mom) were not shy in touting their alleged superiority over Poles and Italians who lived in their neighborhoods. Blacks were never mentioned in conversation, unless Nan or one of my parents marveled at entertainers such as Arthur Duncan (*Lawrence Welk*), Eddie Anderson (*Jack Benny*), and Bill Robinson (*Shirley Temple* movies). None of them liked Martin Luther King at all, fearing that he going to upset the status quo.

- To my knowledge there was only one time when Nan's closet racism became public. Unfortunately, this occurred when I was seriously dating Berta, who agreed one Friday afternoon in 1974 to accompany Nan on the train from Glenside Station to the Reading Terminal, and then walk her over to the store so that they could both drive over to Cherry Hill with Dad and my brothers. Nan had already begun to show signs of mental decline. This train trip proved without the slightest doubt that she had lost control of her ability to speak socially appropriately. Halfway through the trip Nan began criticizing people in the train for the way they looked, the way they talked, the ethnicity they exhibited. Worse yet, she would point at the people she was disparaging. Berta was embarrassed: she could not get Nan to keep her opinions to herself, and the passengers were beginning to get upset at Nan's offensive ramblings. Berta feared they were going to get accosted as soon as they left the train. When the two of them finally got to the store, Berta pulled me aside. She was livid. I had never seen Berta so mad before, and I've never seen her so bad since. She was so upset she almost came close to calling off our date for that weekend. Never again did she volunteer to accompany Nan anywhere.

- I never figured out whether Nan demanded unquestioning loyalty from her children or not. My uncle Jim stayed in the McMahon Street house until he was in his early 30s, when he got married and moved to Florida. I have to wonder whether Nan made him feel that he, as the first born, was obligated not to leave her side. My parents bought their first house at 913 East Price Street largely because it was only a mile away from the Moffet family home—and a forty-minute drive away from where Dad worked in downtown Philadelphia. Mom would walk over to 5610 McMahon several times each week and spend several hours there each time. When we moved to Cherry Hill (NJ) in 1965, Nan became a regular visitor, often staying for weeks at a time (especially after Mom needed consolation after giving birth to her brain-damaged daughter). The older and more frail she got, the longer her visits would last. If Uncle Jim's move to the South could be seen as a long-awaited escape from a domineering mother (he rarely came back north for a visit), it is easy to see that Mom, as the second-oldest child, felt responsible for Nan's physical and mental well being. The same cannot be said of her younger siblings. Uncle Jerry was an affable guy who was aways smiling. After being honorably discharged from the Army he proposed to a girl whom he had been dating for few years. Nan exploded. She did not approve of his decision to marry without consulting her; she did not approve of Jerry's choice of a spouse and allegedly did everything she could to scare the poor girl away. Nan ended up getting her way; Jerry retreated into himself. To spite his mother he married a woman neither he nor she cared much for, and failed to cash in on whatever promise life might have held for him. The youngest sibling, Helene, rebelled as a teenager against the iron-fisted rules of her mother—something Mom felt was as immature as it was scandalous. In her early 20s she married a man whom Nan did not like at all—the feeling was mutual—and kept her distance for a good 20 years, even though they ended up living roughly in the same neighborhood in North Philadelphia. I remember numerous occasions in the mid 1960s when Mom would have altercations on the phone with Helene, accusing her of being irresponsible, immature, and ungrateful. In fact, Mom did not speak to Helene for over fifty years, despite Nan's efforts to bring them together. The only regret that Nan ever expressed to me was that her two daughters refused to talk to each other. She sensed that they would reconcile only after she had passed away. She was right. Shortly after Nan's funeral, Mom and Helene began a long, cautious rapprochement that ended only after Mom came down with Alzheimer's.

- Mom had her disagreements with Nan, but they were never volatile. I sense that Mom was the victor in most of these discussions. One exception, perhaps, was the way sandwiches were supposed to be made. Mom always cut them straight down the middle, so that we ended on with two equally sized rectangles on our plate. Nan cut them diagonally, so that our plate held two triangles. Bob and I told Mom once that the way Nan cut sandwiches made them taste better. She was visibly miffed and simply told us to eat what she had prepared. She never honored our requests to cut them diagonally.

- As noted earlier, in her 70s Nan lived with us in Cherry Hill for long stretches of time. Our house was a five-minute walk from the church; as a devour Roman Catholic, Nan went to church every Sunday and took special pains to make sure she looked nice. The last thing she would do before leaving the house was to put hairspray on. I'm not sure whether she was rushed for time or whether her mental acuity was beginning to fail: One Sunday she sprayed her hair with floor shampoo. No one noticed anything until she had taken a seat in one of the front pews in the church. Her hair began to foam. Someone brought this to her attention and, embarrassed, she made a bee-line for home.

- Nan took care of me and my brothers whenever my parents went on vacation, which was very seldom. Having viewed my parents' collection of slides and 35mm films I know that they took a cruise to the Bahamas at least twice. I assume they were gone for a week at a time. Nan must have prepared meals for us, ironed clothes for us, put us to bed, perhaps even played games with us. Regrettably, I have no memories whatsoever of what those weeks without parents were like.

- Nan was very knowledgeable about tv shows, movies, and celebrities. She was always able to answer any question I had about actors I saw on tv. She loved watching anything with Burt Lancaster, Robert Mitchum, or Ward Bond.

- In her 70s Nan had her own two-room apartment at a retirement community in Glenside, just off of Easton Road. Honey lived at the same complex, about ten units farther down the road. We found out from Honey and Helene that Nan had begun participating in some of the activities that the seniors began hosting, such as Bingo. Before long she had begun flirting with an elderly man named Emil, despite her repeated pledge that she would never betray her deceased husband. Nothing really came of this late "puppy love," but for a few years we noticed that Nan was taking better care of herself, paying particular attention to her appearance. There were even a few occasions when she rejected our invitation to spend a weekend in Cherry Hill so that she could spend more time with Emil. She would get embarrassed when we began teasing her about this "budding romance," but it was also very clear that she felt rejuvenated.

- This photo from 1961 shows Nan at the shore, probably Atlantic City. She really did not like the beach much at all: she hated being exposed to sunlight, so she would sit for hours in a lawn chair, under an umbrella, watching me and my brothers frolic in the sand. She always wore clothes not meant for the beach: a full-length dress and a strand of pearls that she received from her husband (note the next photo of her wearing nearly the same clothes, 15 years later). Why did she come along with us to the shore, then? If I were to be uncharitable, I would say that, as an unemployed widow in an

empty nest, she had nothing better to do on the weekends. More importantly, though, she absolutely **loved** the boardwalk. She took great delight in watching other people, but she also looked forward to eating dinner at Captain Starns and buying things to satisfy her sweet tooth at various shops on the boardwalk. Another plausible rationale was that, due to financial constraints, she never had a vacation; it's possible she never had a real honeymoon. So these trips to the short became her sole getaways. See my narrative about "The Weintrauts at the Shore" for more details.

- I do not believe that Nan's family were ever on the edge of destitution. While they never had to fear threatening visits by a landlord, they also seem to have had little discretionary income. My sense is that her parents and her siblings learned how to make the most out of the little they had—a lesson that probably served them well in the throes of the Great Depression. Nan might have been entitled to a widower's pension. If she was, I have no idea how much that might have been. She was able to maintain the house on McMahon Avenue until the late 1960s; she seems to have had enough income to pay rent for the apartment she lived in until the end of her life. As kids, though, we thought she was exceptionally cheap. For every special occasion—birthday, confirmation, graduation—we received a greeting card with a $10 bill. I remember quipping in the late 1960s that Nan's generosity was not keeping stride with the inflation index. Whenever anyone gave her a gift for a special event, she would first take the greeting card out of the envelope—**not** to read the sentiment, but to flip the card to its back side to see how much the gifter had spend on the card. She would simply gush over the person fortunate enough to spend a few dollars on the card and gently dismiss the poor soul who bought her a "cheap" card.

  My uncle Jim bought Nan an upright piano when she lived in the two-story house on McMahon Avenue. Perhaps he had a guilty conscience about getting married and leaving his mother alone. When it came time for her to move to a much smaller apartment, the big question was: What was to become of the piano? Mom and Dad offered to pay for the moving costs of having it moved to their living room, where Nan would be able to play it whenever she came for a visit—which was quite often. Nan would hear nothing of it. Either we bought the piano from her for full price, or she would look for another buyer. I'm somewhat surprised that Dad agreed to pay her a thousand dollars or so for the piano (under pressure from Mom?), not to mention the occasional subsidy for groceries and rent.

  Nan lived and ate with our family in Cherry Hill for the better part of fifteen years. To my knowledge she never made the slightest gesture to pay for any part of the never-asked-

for room and board. Not that she was ungrateful! In all likelihood she did not have sufficient funds to even consider making any such gesture. She rarely went shopping with Mom, but then again someone had to stay home a mind Neil, Steve, and Cindy. Most importantly, I think, Nan served as a sounding board and a moral support when Mom went through a lengthy depression after Cindy's birth. Perhaps just being there for Mom was priceless.

So, who was my maternal grandmother, Anne Curran? What follows is an abridged version of unpublished research conducted by my aunt Helene Moffet Matt in 1981, some of which is embellished by information I discovered while reviewing documents in the website A*ncestry.com*. Much of what Helene presented was based on oral history: she interviewed senior family members and distant relatives, each of whom recounted details of their own recollections. For this reason the accounts are not always historically verifiable, but their truthfulness cannot be necessarily disputed.

In May 1837, in County Mayo in Ireland, an arranged marriage between Bridget Keary and Thomas McDermott was made official. Bridget's hand was offered to Thomas in exchange for a cow. Shortly thereafter Ireland suffered from the infamous potato famine, a period of acute starvation and disease that led to mass emigration. The McDermotts decided to seek their fortune in the USA, following in the footsteps of relatives who had settled in Raven Run in Schuylkill County in Pennsylvania. Here they could find work in coal mines.

On 1 October 1865 the McDermotts gave birth to their third child, Bridget McDermott. Bridget attended school for a few years, but her livelihood depended on her skills as a seamstress. In her early 20s she began dating James Joseph Curran (185-20-3622), the son of immigrants who as a boy had worked as a slate picker in a coal mine. Both James and Bridget shared a love of reading; what they did not share was social status. As an immigrant from County Mayo, Bridget was considered to be inferior Irish and thus an unsuitable spouse for Curran. The ensuing friction between James and his parents threatened his courtship of Bridget, but on 3 January 1889 the two were married despite the parental objections. Shortly after the marriage James suffered a severe injury while working in a coal mine—an injury that led to a life-long facial discoloration.

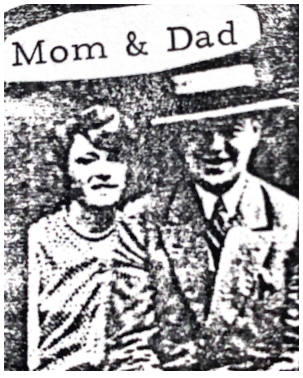
According to the Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia, around the turn of the century the largest group of immigrants in Philadelphia was the Irish, numbering 110,935 or 41 percent of the foreign-born population. The McDermott family contributed to this mass immigration. In 1898 James left Bridget and her six children in Raven Run in order to seek a better job opportunity in Philadelphia. He ended up being employed at a boxcar shop in Nicetown, at Clarissa and Bristol Streets. Perhaps this is where the SEPTA Liberty Yard Railroad Facility is currently located. Within a year he had saved up enough money to secure a home for the family at 2048 Newcomb Street. Before the end of the century the entire family was living under one roof again.

On 7 August 1900 Bridget gave birth to Anne Margaret, my grandmother; over the next eight years she gave birth to another four children. Of the eleven children Bridget brought into this world, only five survived childhood. In 1902 the McDermott family moved a couple of blocks to the north to 1931 Bristol Street. Supposedly neither house had electricity. Lighting was provided by a gas meter in the basement. As soon as lighting became dim, someone would have to rush down to the basement and insert a quarter in the meter. All cooking was done on a coal stove; the coal was likely stored in the basement as well.

Anne was evidently quite gifted. At home she led singalong sessions during which her younger brother Joe would play the flute and, much later, her husband would play the mandolin. She excelled at school, distinguishing herself by her skills own the piano and her dulcet singing voice. She was also crowned Blessed Mother during the May Procession, a distinction awarded to only the best and most popular student. Upon completing the eighth grade Anne attended a two-year Commercial Course at St Stephen's Parish School which prepared her for work as a secretary by 1917. In the 1920s Anne would often accompany her younger sister Honey to dances on the Parkway.

On the afternoon of 29 July 1925, after a long courtship, Anne married James Curran in St Stephen's Church in a very sparse ceremony: no reception, no photos, no bridal gown. For twelve years they lived in cramped quarters at 3939 North Smedley Street: a small house inhabited by Anne and James, their three children, Honey, and two grandparents. This was a source of severe marital strife since James insisted on moving to a larger house and Anne demanding that they stay put. More than once the children wept themselves to sleep while their parents argued loudly in an adjacent room. This situation was exacerbated when James' parents suddenly needed a place to live. The Curran family finally rented a larger house at 635 East Woodlawn Avenue in Germantown. Now there were ten people living under one roof; conflicts became so severe that James had to ask his parents to seek shelter elsewhere. When the owners of the house on East Woodlawn decided that they did not want to rent any longer, the Curran family bought the twin house at 5610 McMahon Avenue—the house that I came to know so well during my childhood.

Here are two photos that Aunt Helene had photocopied. Both show Nan as a young woman:



More on James and Bridget Curran

After working at the box car facility, James became a faculty worker at a nearby plant until he was forcibly retired at the age of 59. Since he considered idle hands the work of the devil, he worked as a night watchman at Brady's Garage at 16th and Luzerne Streets for the next ten years. Even at age 80 he was working at Sharpe & Flynn, a company fabricating metals.

Bridget managed the Curran household so efficiently that by 1922 she had saved up two thousand dollars, enough to purchase a house at 3939 North Smedley Street.

More on Honey

Honey was born on 30 May 1908. She was schooled until the seventh grade, when she decided to enter the work force as a weaver for the Mauer company at Bristol and Wayne Avenues. She remained in this position until 1950, when she decided to take care of her elderly parents full time. After their death she resumed working as a weaver in 1957 until she lost control of her arm in an auto accident in 1969. She resented the way that women were treated in the family in particular and in society in general; she felt that women always ended up doing more work than men for less recognition.

I remember asking Mom and Nan once why Honey was not married. They told me that she had been engaged to a young man, but he died in the First World War. Honey wanted to remain true to her first and only love and never dated anyone again. Evidently I misunderstood something, or both Mom and Nan fabricated a story. The War ended in 1918. That meant she would have had to been engaged when she was 9 years old. Could it have been possible that she met this man in her late 30s and that he died in the early 1940s? Or is it possible that Honey had no interest in men and resolved at an early age to remain single? My brother Bob is convinced that Honey was a lesbian. He might be right.

Honey had very little to do with our family as I was growing up. I don't know whether Mom had no special feelings for her, whether Nan conspired to keep Honey out of our lives, or whether Honey was simply dead set on being was independent as possible. The bottom line is that I have no memories of her being invited to our house for birthdays, holidays, or other special occasions. Or perhaps she was indeed invited but decided not to come. I knew that I had an Aunt Honey who lived somewhere in the Philadelphia area, but that was almost tantamount to saying that I knew that George Washington was the first president. I am not aware that Mom had any exchanges with Honey until well after Nan passed away. Even then I think their conversations occurred over phone, not in person.

When I was dating Berta in the early 1970s, Nan had moved out of the spacious house on McMahon Avenue and into a three-room apartment on Easton Road in Glenside—about three miles from where Berta's parents lived. Did she decide to live in this apartment complex

because her sister Honey had been living there since her car accident? Was it mere coincidence? It seems like they talked to each other frequently and even attended community gatherings together. I overheard a few conversations between Mom and Nan in which my grandmother spoke disparagingly about Honey, but I never had the sense that these disagreements caused irreparable harm.

In 1974 I got permission from Nan and my parents to stay in her apartment on Saturday nights so that I could spend as much time as possible with Berta and not risk the forty-five-minute, late-night drive back to Cherry Hill. I was happy to take advantage of this opportunity: the more time I could spend with Berta, the better! But this opportunity came at a price: I was expected to pay an occasional courtesy call to Honey.

I visited Honey at least twice, possibly three times. I had no idea what I was supposed to say and not say, so these brief conversations were always awkward. I did not know Honey, and Honey did not know me. The only things we had in common was Nan and some genetic material. Nonetheless, Honey was always gracious. She was evidently intelligent, well read, and could discuss contemporary issues tactfully, weighing the pros and cons. She never pried into my personal affairs, never urged me to bring Berta along for a visit, never gave me a mission to complete once I was back home with Nan and my parents.