

I don't know much about Dad's mother. We hardly ever visited her, and she never set foot into our house on Price Street, even for celebrations and holidays. Geographical distance could have not have played any role: there were only 10 miles between Price Street and North 62nd; a car ride would probably have taken about a half hour. A more likely reason was cultural distance: Mom had some deep-seated antipathy to any foreigners (I can vividly recall her making snide remarks about the Italians, Poles, Germans, and Czechs who lived in our Price Street neighborhood), and Dad's mom did not try to hide her Eastern European roots. Mom spoke disparagingly of anyone who drank alcohol, and Dad's mom had an unabashed taste for beer. Mom disapproved of people who rented rooms of their house to strangers, and there were two men who lived with Dad's mom, Barney Gallagher and another whose name I have forgotten. More importantly, perhaps, Mom had a jealous streak and was not inclined to share her husband with another woman, even if it was his own mother. Needless to say, there were times when Dad did go to visit his mother, but he went alone. I assume that Mom discouraged him from taking us along. Nonetheless, there are several photos that show we did visit her as a family on a few occasions.

Cecelia Bolaczin, Bolatcin, Boletcin, or Blatcin (I have not been able to locate any authoritative spelling of her maiden name) was born on 27 May 1904 in what was then known as the Austro-Hungarian empire. Dad insisted that she immigrated as a seven- or eight-year-old to the United States; the 1930 census claims that she immigrated to the USA in 1912. Dad also insisted that she immigrated with two brothers who settled in different locations in Pennsylvania, but I have only been able to verify one: Frank Morkish. According to the 1920 census, Frank was an immigrant from Slovakia who lodged at the home of a coal miner named Wayne Peoples. The Peoples family lived in Lawrence, PA, in the vicinity of Pittsburgh. The 1930 census indicates that Frank hailed from Austria and had married a native Pennsylvanian named Emma—a woman who very well may have been Wayne Peoples' daughter. It also claims that Frank, Emma, and their one-year-old son (Frank) lived as boarders with Dad's parents on Hirst Street in West Philadelphia. Frank was employed as an auto upholsterer who spent the rest of his life in the Philadelphia area, although we never visited him. Later on, he changed his name to Morris. This documentation offers more questions than answers:

- Assuming that Cecelia and Frank were siblings, why did they have different last names? Since she was the elder sibling by two years, did her father die? Did her mother remarry so quickly after his death?
- At the time of emigration, Cecelia was 8, Frank was 6. Did they emigrate with their parents? If yes, how come there is no record of their immigration? If not, these two children must have been terrified. Who guaranteed their safety during the long, arduous trip? Who vouched for their arrival and placement in the United States? Is it possible that they were entrusted by their parents or guardians to a Catholic charity?
- War had not yet erupted in Europe. There were no violent rebellions in the Austro-Hungarian empire, so the children would not qualify as asylum seekers. So why were these

two children sent to the United States (alone)? The families they ended up staying with apparently had no ethnic connection to Austria or Slovakia. Who met them at Ellis Island? How did they get brought to towns in the middle of Pennsylvania?

Dad always said that Cecelia was the maid for the owner of a large store in Williamsport, but the 1920 census lists her as a servant in the household headed by Roland Curtin Wright, an Assistant Cashier in a savings bank in Clearfield, Pennsylvania—a town on the Susquehanna about 95 southwest of Williamsport and 120 miles northeast of Pittsburgh. The 1930 census continues to list him as a cashier; his daughter was a bookkeeper at a bank (the same bank?), and his son was a bookkeeper in general practice. Once again, this documentation offers more questions than answers:

- How did Cecelia get to know this family? Was the Catholic Church instrumental in finding foster families for immigrants from Eastern Europe? Had she lived with other families before being placed with the Wrights?
- Why did the family of a bank clerk need a servant? How could they afford a servant?
- Cecelia is listed as a servant in the 1920 census. How long was she employed as a servant? Did her service begin at age 8 or once she became a teenager? What kind of chores did she take care of?



The photo to the left portrays Cecelia as a young teen. She is wearing a plain medallion and what might pass as servant's attire. On the reverse side Dad wrote that she was feeling ill at the time of this photo. To the left you see a more mature Cecelia, probably in her late teens or early twenties. Since she is wearing a fancier dress and a strand of pearls, it's quite possible that this was taken after she married.



Somehow Cecelia met and fell in love with Edward Aloysius Weintraut, from Jeddo, PA, a town south of Wilkes-Barre, PA. Census data show that he spent his childhood in Darby outside Philadelphia, but somehow had landed a job as a bricklayer in Williamsport. There is quite a distance between Williamsport and Clearfield, and roads were still rather primitive, so I am at a loss to explain how the two came to know each other. Perhaps Cecelia's landlord took her on a

business trip (did cashiers make business trips?); perhaps Cecelia and Edward Aloysius attended a regional fair sponsored by the Catholic Church; perhaps they exchanged letters through a matchmaking service (of the Church?). Whatever the reason, the two came to know each other well enough that they married on 30 July 1921 in Hollidaysburg, PA, a town near Altoona. She was only 17 at the time; he was 24.

Edward A Weintraut, of Williamsport, and Cecelia Boletcin, of Clearfield, were united in marriage by Justice of the Peace C. Irwin Lewis at his office on Saturday morning last. The bride is a very excellent young woman and the man of her choice is a popular bricklayer of his home city. At the conclusion of a wedding tour, the newly weds will go housekeeping at Williamsport (Altoona Tribune, 3 August 1921)

Their marriage was a civil ceremony. I have not been able to find whether they, as Catholics, were married under the auspices of the Catholic Church. Dad claims that both parents were practicing Catholics until a young priest in South Philadelphia “approached Cecelia wrongly.” From this point on, Edward Aloysius had nothing to do with the Catholic Church aside from attending the christening of his children. He and his wife were nominal Catholics for the remainder of their lives.

It seems that the newlyweds did not stay in Williamsport long. Edward Aloysius and Cecelia moved first to South Philadelphia, then to West Philadelphia after the incident with the priest. According to the 1930 census, they lived in a rented home at 40 North Hirst Street, paying \$40 a month (\$640 in 2021 dollars). The census reports that the family did not even own a radio. This house was just around the corner from 34 North 62nd Street—the street that Dad erroneously thought he and his sister were born in. They paid \$30 monthly (\$570 in 2021 dollars) for the house on 62nd Street. Dad recalls that the house had three bedrooms: one for a boarder, one for his sister and him, and one for his parents. They all shared one bathroom.

In 1930 Edward Aloysius was listed as a steam fitter. In 1939 he earned \$1,900 annually (\$36,100 in 2021 dollars) as a bricklayer for the public school system. To help make ends meet, in 1940 they also had a boarder named George who was a fireman on a tugboat. According to Dad, this was “a terrific man in his 40s ... who came home around 10 or 12 midnight and left the house around 6-7 in the morning. He never made any noise and he minded his own business.”



This is the only extant photo of Dad's parents together, presumably taken in the late 1930s. Cecelia is wearing a rather ornate dress, accessorized with a necklace. Edward Aloysius looks proud and confident, draping his right arm around his wife's slender body. I assume that this photo was taken before his infidelity undermined their marriage. Dad never accused his father of being physically abusive, but seems to have shared his mother's fear of the dark side of Edward Aloysius

There are few photos of Cecelia that Dad kept in his album, and none of these have any annotations. I assume that the photo to the left shows Cecelia with her nephew Frank. If this is true, then the photo had to have been taken in 1929 or 1930. The next photo shows Cecelia wearing a rather fancy stole and hat, probably in the mid 1930s. A comparison with the other photos suggests that the third must have been taken in the 1940s: Cecelia facial features look older. The final photo shows Cecelia walking downtown with her children. Dad looks like he might be about 14 years old. If so, then the photo was taken in 1942.



After these photos were taken, Cecelia suffered from her husband's cheating. I'll let Dad reveal what happened:

At some point Dad, who was always out on Saturdays, started coming home later on Saturday night. Mom would pounce on him and fight for an hour. "Where were you? What were you doing?" We never had a car or a TV, but he got a phone hung in the dining room, so Dad could call his girl friend from South Philly. He must have told Mom about some of the goings-on. He had the nerve to receive phone calls from his girlfriend at home, and he also called her with whispered conversations. He was always home on Sundays. Mom would be all upset and cried bitterly. Finally she had a phone put in our roomer's closet upstairs, so that if anyone called Dad, she could listen in as a spy. I'm sure he would have cursed and punched her out if he had ever known about it. She had the bell in the phone disconnected and told the roomer never to say a word about it. The roomer was greatly disturbed himself about the problem. During the week after 7 pm, every time the phone rang in the dining room, she would hurry upstairs to sit in the closet and listen to the conversation. She was not able to confront Dad with her secret, fearing that her life was in danger ... My uncle told me his woman friend, an Italian woman with a 25-year-old son, liked Dad a lot and provided him lots of money to gamble, where he made out OK. This was where he was spending his Saturday nights: seeing his girl friend ... Dad had ordered a brand new twelve-cylinder Lincoln coupe. I saw him pay for it in cash. It must have cost over \$3000. It was the most beautiful car I had ever seen and he parked it outside the house while he got his driver's license. How he was set. Every Saturday morning he would drive off in his Lincoln, never taking Mom anywhere. I think maybe once he drove the family (with Mom and Leona) to show off the car to his brother up in Lawndale. He was a real big cheese now, but he still went to work at the public school every day ... He was deeply involved with the woman in South Philly. Mom had me shadow him one Saturday night, but red lights made it hard to keep up the pursuit. One day she paid my boyfriend to follow him in his old jalopy, with her in the passenger seat. I don't know how this turned out. One time, Mom caught the woman on the phone while in the closet and told her off good, that was when Dad ripped the phone out of the wall. The friction at home was tremendous.

Edward Aloysius died in 1950. Curiously, his death certificate does not reveal for cause of death, but Dad suggested it was because his father smoked three packs a day and suffered from asbestos poisoning.

By the time of Edward Aloysius' death, Dad had become very serious in his courting Mom. They married in 1952. Around this time we find the next few photos of Cecelia:



Cecelia looks much older here. To be sure, she is approaching 50 and the stress of a failed marriage has taken its toll. The photo to the left shows a rare photo of Mom with Cecelia: It is 1952; they are visiting Dad at Fort Bragg. I assume that he has driven them both to the army base in his Hudson, that I believe is seen to their left. If my assumption is true, then that leaves huge questions unanswered: How did Mom and Cecelia get back to Philadelphia? By train? Did they even get along with each other at this time? Did Dad entrust his car to Mom (highly unlikely!)? Is this before or after the marriage? Did Mom stay for a few weeks, leaving Cecelia to fare for herself?

The photo to the right is equally rare, since it portrays me with my two grandmothers—the only time both are seen together, at a location I cannot identify. Perhaps at Anne Hutchinson's house, the woman you see to the left? If so, why is everyone visiting her?

The middle photo shows Cecelia by herself on the marching grounds at Fort Bragg. I find this photo somewhat sad: her only daughter has already left home and married a charming but disreputable man; her husband has just passed away; and her only son is beginning his own family. She looks at the camera confidently, but I have to wonder if she is apprehensive about her future.

One of the things weighing on her mind has to be her daughter, whose husband led her into a life of petty crime: shoplifting; passing bad checks; evading authorities by constantly changing addresses. As Dad reported, "soon they were in court, but they always talked their way out of trouble by promising to repay the people whom they swindled. They simply gave them worthless checks dated for a future date." Leona and her husband served several years in prison in New Jersey and in Florida; their children were sent to foster homes. At this time Cecelia was working several odd jobs just to make ends meet. Dad would regularly visit her and leave her money to help her stay above water; Leona would regularly write her and beg for money. Much too late Dad realized that Cecelia was sending Leona the money that he had been giving to his mother. Dad quickly severed all communication with Leona and implored his mother to do the same.

During the 1950s and 1960s we would visit Cecelia sporadically. As I mentioned earlier, Mom harbored an antipathy towards Dad's side of the family. Leona was surely a compelling reason to keep one's distance, but I always thought that Cecelia was a kind and gracious woman. I do not have any vivid memories of our visits. The photos to be shown below are proof that we did visit Cecelia on occasion, but they do not help me shake cobwebs off of any experiences, positive or negative. The one thing I do recall vividly are the smells or aromas that permeated the house on North 62nd Street. Mom always kept our home antiseptically devoid of any excitements to the nose. The contrast to Cecelia's home was powerfully striking. As I discovered later in life, the most conspicuous smell was beer, but various potpourris certainly provided accents. Perhaps herbs and fruits also played a complementary role. As I turned 11 or 12 I felt that I was entering Eastern Europe whenever we walked through the door to her home. I can't explain why or how I came upon this analogy, but it still seems to make sense to me.

This photo accurately captures what I races into my mind's eye when I think of Cecelia's home. The man in the middle is Barney Gallagher, the venerable boarder I mentioned earlier. I have no idea who the other people are, but Cecelia never seemed to be at a loss for friends or visitors. Behind Cecelia is the cage in which she kept her pet canary. Wafting through the air inhaled and exhaled by all these people is the beer-drenched aroma that I can still smell to this day.



This photo, taken in 1964, two years before her death, shows Cecelia sitting with a bouquet of flowers in front of her mantelpiece, replete with all kinds of figurines and knickknacks. These small decorations could be found everywhere in the rooms downstairs—we were prohibited from going upstairs. Like the rule in most every museum, we were allowed to look but not to touch. Dad's fondness for such trinkets can probably be traced back to his mother's collection.

These photos show our family during visits to Cecelia's house, ranging from 1959 to 1961. The ones to the left seems to have been taken at Christmas time; the one to the right is the only photo showing Dad alone with his mother.



These photos between 1961 and 1965 show Cecelia with her grandchildren. I am struck most by the last photo. Cecelia is clearly not well. She had just been released from the hospital. She is sitting in a wheel chair, looking bloated, especially when compared to the way she looks in all previous photos. Cecelia passed away on 30 June 1966, suffering from overwhelming toxemia, cirrhosis of the liver, and left ventricle failure. I wish our visits had not been so short and so infrequent. Questions I have about her life experience will unfortunately remain unanswered.

