

My Favorite Aunt

By
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Please excuse my boldness in selecting a favorite from our Clan, but I am compelled to do so. May I present to you my Grandmother's youngest sister and Flower Girl at her Wedding in 1900, Martha Sweet Heckerman. What was not to love about her? She grew up on Church St., Saxton and Grandmother told me she was a first women to own and ride her own horse and later first to have a driver's license and car. She was loved and admired by all.

You could count on a warm welcome anytime you came to her gracious home on Juliana Heights in Bedford. Bringing a friend along was allowed, even to overnights during Bedford Fair week. Her guestroom was well appointed, a book and Kleenex at the bedside table. Oh yes, flowers. Name it and it seemed to be there. Her living room included several most comfortable chairs with a current book and or needle work in progress at each. Therefore anywhere she sat she could pick up from there. This amazing lady could be preparing meals, scrubbing her kitchen floor, no matter the task and still look and act like a lady.

After her second stroke she told me she had learned to walk for the third time! Our departing was always the smile and waves from the front door and we'd wave going downhill 'til we could see her no more. What a privilege to know this regal lady.

But really my favorite aunt was Helen Nace, from McConnellsburg. Can you believe she dated Bob's elder brother first? In fact Bill introduced Bob to Helen.

Such a pretty and precious lady she was. When you were with her, especially on a one on one, she gave her full attention to you. Your interests, concerns, plans, current jobs were hers as well. You knew she cared and when you left you felt refreshed. She was our "Fashion Bug". A pair of gloves on sale could spark a whole new outfit. As for footwear she wore size 4 like "sample" shoes, in the store window. This enabled her a plethora of them at little or no cost. Aunt Hel [which I never called her to her face] was a great housecleaner, having two vacuums, one up and one

down. I guessed she went half way down with the up vac and reverse with the down one. Her flower garden was gorgeous. The one in Lake Lucerne was the entire length of the driveway. She was one more lady gardener to influence me. Early on I hoped for a driveway to match hers.

Today I wonder if I ever told her how very much I was delighted, though not surprised, at her "taking our Martha in". She and Bob helped her get acquainted with the area, job wise and housing location, to get settled after driving alone from Brownstown, TX to Cleveland.

Actually, Charlotte Enyeart was my very favorite aunt. She was "local", this tall willowy and gorgeous lady friend of Uncle Eli's from down in the Hollow on Spring Street. Both were headed for a career in Medicine and she attained a new and rare combination for the time and graduated from Elmira with an R.N. and a BS. in five years. They were working Buddies of the finest and yes, Char was Eli's office nurse. I can picture her in the kitchen, at the mangle, ironing sheets and all office linens on her "off time." But what fun it was to visit them with two darling little boys to entertain or be entertained by. I could get to 308 S.George St., York by Greyhound while living in Merion [where we left when I was 11 and finished 6th grade] and later from Saxton, thus traveling alone. Independence! Aunt Char took me shopping which seemed was a fun thing for her too. One trip she bought me a yellow one piece snug fitting bathing suit. Did I think I was someone special. Years later while I was attending Millersville State Teachers College, now M U, she lent me the choice of her formal gowns to wear to Bill Keays' Senior Banquet . It was electric blue and scandalously gorgeous for 1949, with low neckline and long slit up the front. I was always fascinated that Char and Eli wore cameo rings with the God and Goddess of Medicine on them, their Wedding rings.

To tell the truth we go back to Bedford to meet my really real favorite, Aunt Jean Brice. This beautiful lady was my pick as the Artist of the family. Today we know she raised one too. This lady also welcomed me and I recall visiting at her Dad's home.

He was Bill Brice and I thought the owner of the Bedford Fair. At least I had tickets for whatever I needed at the Fair. This home was across the street and down a bit from the County Jail and I recall hearing men singing a bit off key in the evening and early morning. It took some years to understand why they might be there. More importantly, Aunt Jean introduced me to horses. They were right close to the Brice home. In fact Jill said the Barn the horses were in was on their property. Aunt Jean got me on a horse and I loved it. When I went home my Dad bought me an aluminum bike, which I named Silver, to get over my falling in love with horses. We lived in Chevy Chase at the time and I could not have a horse there. Jean, like all of my aunts, was a snazzy dresser. She lent me a red plaid formal I wore to the Junior Prom. Was I lucky or what?! Aunt Jean raised my self-esteem when she first asked me to come stay over night with Jill and be her big sister/caretaker. It worked so well that I could manage a few days at a time for Uncle Dick and Aunt Jean to go longer and further. Meals were a cinch, as we walked down a block or so to the Fort Bedford Inn, where the menu was grand and the bill was prepaid. Sue was with me on one of these Cousin caring jobs, and she was a huge help as she had much experience with younger girls.

Woops. If you promise, Scouts Honor, not to tell I'll come up with the truth. There is one Aunt I loved best of all and spent much of my life with, but she wasn't really my aunt. I saw her love and care for all ages, but when my Cousins came to visit I saw she treated them just as she treated me and I was glad. You called her Aunt Hortense. Certainly I admired and loved her the very most. We went from Mother-Daughter relationship sooner than most. We slowly made the transition to become Best Friends, perhaps after Dad's departure from Earth. I think way back to Judy's visit with us in Merion, suburban Philadelphia where Uncle Bob had occasional business in the home office of Curtis Publishing Co. At last a little sister, if only for it a few days it beat no days at all. They came on a "sleeper" on the Pennsy from Cleveland, way out in the middle west.

I could hardly wait to do that, and did many years later, sharing the berth with one in utero and an almost two year old darling daughter, heading to the far mid-west. When we moved to Saxton Sue could come and stay for a lengthy visit as my Mother, another RN, could tailor meals for Sue's wheat allergy. Many other cousins came since we shared Grandmother, and her home, who had love enough for us all, and it was like Christmas year round. Jill came some days with Dick as he had an office at Eichelbergers Store across the street. I well recall watching the gentle care Mother gave Jill in removing tangles. It paid off as a lesson to me when I kept Jill in Bedford. With these and many more shining examples of Aunthood I had a file full to use in future years.

Besides being a splendid Mother and Aunt, Hortense loved her job at the Bedford Memorial Hospital, in obstetrics, her choice. She did not need to work away from home 'til Allie was in High School. She did want to be home for us kids as she was both our young Mother and Dad, actually at age 37. Six years latter a similar scenario at that age, but a sudden and tragic death, caused Helen Mar, aka, Aunt Sister to raise her two alone. Since those two ladies were my two mentors can you imagine how relieved I was to reach 38 and no such grief had fallen on me? It also was cause for the younger brothers to take Bill's advice to purchase Life Insurance.

Rereading this oh so long ramble thru my life I hear Dad say that everyone has a book in them, but it is just as well they never write one. I also can say that the Eichelberger Boys made excellent selections for life partners, as did Jim Green and Ross Snyder.

To continue with two more of My Favorite Aunts would take volumes. Please may the Green and Snyder Kids give me 'til Reunion 2010 to work on it. As a summary all I need to do for a delicious, instant, on file in sight and sound memory is think of those two sisters, Helen Mar and Bettie together. We had laughter and piano music to charm this world into Peace.

God richly blessed us to have had all of these lovely ladies in our family!