

Aunt Clara & Uncle Bill (my father's sister)



**My Mother with boyfriend,
Murray**

My dear Aunt Clara - such a kind and loving and giving person. My Father's oldest sister who lived at 66 Flora Street in St. Thomas and who took in my Mother and Father and I when we were destitute because of the Market Crash in 1929. Of course her daughter and my cousin Edna and I were like sisters. We got along famously. If we got a cold Aunt Clara would doctor us up with mustard plasters or onion plasters. She was an excellent cook and I well remember her famous casserole of Macaroni and Cheese.

She was an active church worker - though Uncle Bill never went to church at all. I remember Edna and I removing all the wallpaper from the front and back parlor. We had to soak it with hot water and then scrape it off with paint scrapers. What a monumental chore!

Also, while our own family was staying there, my Father put in new hardwood floors. I suppose to help pay for our keep.

She was an active woman - quick moving and always busy. She was very close to her sister Hilda. One of the happiest times in my life was living with Aunt Clara and Uncle Bill. We were never made to feel like poor relatives. We really enjoyed her front verandah where we would sit and visit and watch all the funny people go by.

We often visited Grandma Faulkner in Port Dover. After Uncle Bill died, Aunt Clara had the house made into two apartments. It was a large house with a dining-room, kitchen, 2 bedrooms and a bath downstairs and 3 bedrooms upstairs. When Aunt Clara became unable to live by herself she went to live with her daughter in London. She was not happy there and missed her home. Later on she was put into a lovely nursing home in St. Thomas - where she later died.

UNCLE BILL

Uncle Bill Miller was an Engineer on the Wabash Railroad in St. Thomas. He was an awful tease and a coarse sort of man. He would say, "Well, I had to marry Clara, she got me out on the end of the pier at Port Dover and told me that if I didn't marry her she'd push me into Lake Erie. Well, I can't swim a stroke - so I had no alternative but to marry her!"

Aunt Clara would bite every time and say, "Oh, Bill, you know that's not so!"

Bill was an aggravator. He would put sugar in his tea and then take his spoon and stir and stir and stir noisily - nearly driving everyone crazy. He loved his beer and drank a lot of it. His hobby was growing roses. He has some beautiful rose bushes in the back yard and spent hours tending to them.

They would go out and gather English walnuts every year. He would spend hours down in the basement hulling them and cracking them and painstakingly picking out the nutmeats. Then Aunt Clara would bake data and nut bread -m-m-good!

Being an engineer and shoveling coal all day long he would be black when he came home. He had a shower installed in the basement which he would always use when he came home from work. Though he never went to church he was dead set against Catholics. At the time, I had a Catholic boyfriend who was to call me on the phone every night about six o'clock. Bill would wait for the call and bust his ass to get to the phone first, then he would yell in a voice you could hear down in the next block, "Phyl, here's that damned Dogan on the phone again!" What could I do? I was so embarrassed.

Black Diphtheria

When I was in Port Dover one summer I met some American girls who were interested in art and we used to go out sketching along the River Lynn and other picturesque places around Dover. We were out on one of our daily sketching tours down by the fishing boats and the dock when I was overcome by a feeling of dreadful sickness. I went home to Grandma as I was running a high fever. She called the Doctor and when he came he diagnosed my illness as a particularly violent case of Black Diphtheria. I will never forget how I suffered. My throat was swollen to the point where I could hardly swallow and was filled with a grey, crepy phlegm. The Doctor told me to gargle with hot salt water. This seemed to help me and to relieve the soreness. Of course, in those days they did not have the wonder drugs that they have now, and I consider myself lucky to have survived this dreadful illness.

Boating on the River Lynn in Port Dover

I used to love going on a boating excursion up the River Lynn with my Father. We would rent a rowboat and row down the river, it was beautiful. There were always lots of seagulls, and lots of red-winged blackbirds. These were happy times.

Pete McNabb

Of course, my boyfriends from St. Thomas used to come down to visit me at Dover. There was Pete McNabb, a Catholic fellow I was very fond of. He had two brothers who were Priests. One was a school-teacher in Toronto and the other was a missionary in China. He had two sisters who were nuns. Pete did his best to convert me to Catholicism but never succeeded.

Saturday Night Dance in Port Dover

There were always Saturday night dances at the dance hall down at the lake. Edna and I used to go down together. This one Saturday night we went and there were not very many present. We sat like wallflowers for a while and then this farmery looking fellow came up to Edna and asked her for a dance. They got out on the floor and he said to her, "Their aren't very many here tonight," and she said "Nope, they're aint." and that was the sum total of their conversation for the rest of the dance. Needless to say, we went home in disgust. This is not the end of the episode, however, We sneaked into the side door and quietly went to bed at 9:30. The next morning after breakfast Mother and I were washing dishes and I said that we were going to go to the movie theatre. That night. Mother said, "You are not going anywhere tonight. You didn't come home until three o'clock this morning and I'm grounding you." I was so mad that I took a dish I was wiping and smashed it against the wall and flounced out of the kitchen.

Running Away

In the afternoon Mother went shopping with Grandma. I packed a suitcase and ran away. I was picked up by two young fellows in a sports car, and they took me to St. Thomas. When I arrived there I went to stay with a special girl-friend of mine, Elma Strickland.

The Chase

Mother and Dad were sure I had run away to Pete McNabb, a chap I had been going steady with in St. Thomas. They were afraid I was going to get married to Pete. Dad high-tailed it to St. Thomas. I was not with Aunt Clara, where he thought I would be, so he went to see Pete. Of course, Pete didn't even know I was in St. Thomas. However, as fate would have it, my cousin Frank saw me on Talbot Street, talked to me and found out that I was staying with Thelma. The cat was out of the bag. So Dad took me back to Dover. Edna upheld my story that we were in early from the dance and peace was restored. Relations were strained between my Mother and I for some time.