

MOM AND DAD

I always loved my folks. And they loved me back although I suspect they liked my sister better. (lol – I like her better too.) Some bits of the following are products of my imagination as I was not actually present, and some events are documented. Nothing is just made up.

Mom, née Edna Ketchum Conover, was born in 1905 and Dad, William Thomas Serle, Sr. in 1910. So they were young still when I came along in 1937. Even younger when my sister Jan arrived in 1932. I'm sure Jan would tell this story differently and maybe better.

Family legend is that they met at Camp Karamac at the Delaware Water Gap. This was an inexpensive camp where young men and women could meet and play on vacation. They slept in rustic cabins or tents.

Activities would include swimming in the Delaware River, playing cards, badminton, boating, tennis, beauty and dance contests, and concerts. There must have been communal family-style meals, evening singing around campfires and maybe even a little romance? Nestled among the cabins was a large recreation hall known as the Wigwam. There was a dance floor, stage, and band.

For many years I thought that the camp was in Pennsylvania in the town of Delaware Water Gap. When we moved to New Jersey we discovered that the camp was on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River.



Young Edna. Year unknown

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The Camp is gone now. I lived nearby and have visited the site several times alone, as well as with Daisy and with my great niece Meg Johnson and her boyfriend Paul.

In addition to my existence and that of much the wonderful family around me that would not be possible without Mom and Dad, there is a trace of Karamack that reverberates in my heart and in my ears at family gatherings.

When the week at Camp Karamac was ended, some campers would depart and newbies would arrive. Good-byes at the Railroad station would often be tearful. So they sang a song to ease the hurt, to the tune of the *Farmer In The Dell*:

I visited the site of Camp Karamac in the winter of 2007. Traces are found on the Jersey side of the Delaware River at the last exit on I-80 before you cross into Pennsylvania. Park near the river. Walk about a mile upstream.

Note the woodland scenes below. Just a few hints of years past remain.



*We hate to see you go,
We hate to see you go,
We hope to hell you never come back,
We hate to see you go.*



In my family almost eight decades later when we part after a visit, we still sing the song. Loud. If there are tears they are a little easier to bear with the joke song in the air.

Edna caught Bill's eye. I picture her playing bridge with her girlfriends. She must have looked very sophisticated and alluring. Smoking cigarettes and telling jokes with Bill glued to her elbow, kibitzing.

A divorcee, Edna was five years older than Bill. He lived with his mother Elizabeth Hertle (nee Donahue) in Brooklyn. He worked at the Brooklyn, New York power station generating electricity for the subway system. Imagine that-a guy with a job during the depression! Mom was working as a secretary.

Edna was living with her sister's family; Belle Helmer, husband Bert and their infant daughters Joan and Dorothy. This may not have been a comfortable arrangement for them as Mom smoked. Bert wouldn't tolerate tobacco use. Mom used to smoke in the bathroom with the window open. So out of the frying pan



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and into the fire of another marriage she went. But she loved Bill and he loved her. My grandmother Elizabeth, we called her Nana, was probably not Mom's favorite person but family ruled so we all lived together in Brooklyn, New York.

Nana died in 1946 when I was about nine and Mom suffered a stroke in about 1948. Jan just told me that Mom had quit working a few months before her stroke. I speculate that she may have been ill. Perhaps she had the same atrial fibrillation that I have had for about seven years and which recently hit Jan too. At this time I feel terrific and Jan looks and acts great.

Jan was just a kid, still in high school. She found Mom in bed and unresponsive. She summoned a neighbor, Helen Leone, who called an ambulance. Dad was on the other side of the world but Jan managed to reach him by radio-telephone to tell him about the situation. She was in tears and, unknown to her, the telephone call was broadcasted all over the ship. Dad came as quick as he could but Jan was stuck as the older sibling for over a month. Mom was in a Manhattan hospital, I was in grade school and she felt like the troubles of the world were on her shoulders. She had to choose between visiting Mom in the hospital and going to School. She's a magnificent hero in my book. A lesser girl would have run away!



Young Edna - date unknown



This must have been taken in the summer of 1943. I was about five. Dad is wearing his wartime uniform as a member of the Merchant Marines and about to go to war. Since there is just one stripe on his sleeve, he had probably just finished his program at the Merchant Marine Academy.



Combat Bar - The Combat Bar is issued to seamen who serve in a ship which, at the time of such service, is directly attacked or damaged by an instrumentality of war. There is further prescribed for issuance a star (to be attached to such bar) to seamen who are forced to abandon ship when so attacked or damaged. For each additional abandonment, an additional star is attached.

The stroke changed everything.

Mom could no longer work or be active. Time must have been heavy on her hands. She could not play the piano or even take walks in the evenings. Dad was away most of the time working as Chief Engineer on the ship S.S. Ines owned by A.H. Bull Company. Mostly he was on a regular schedule involving Puerto

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Rico and Baltimore. When Jan called him I suspect he was further afield; perhaps in Australia.

World War II must have been scary for Mom because so many ships were torpedoed and sunk by the Germans. (Dad too, of course.)

During the War Dad sailed to Europe many times. He went around the world later on, visiting Australia and other far-away places.

My sister Janice is proof-reading this story. She just told me that Dad's ship was torpedoed during the war. She remembers because she'd gone to Manhattan to see a film with Mom and there was a display case of military medals and insignia in the theatre lobby. Mom pointed out a ribbon that Dad had earned. Jan feels that it was Mom's way of telling her that his ship had been attacked. Dad, so far as we knew was not hurt and the ship survived. I just looked it up on the internet and saw the Combat Bar.

Thank goodness for Television. We got our first set shortly after Mom became ill and she got hooked on the tube - along with the rest of the world.

Sadly, Mom passed away in 1957, after years of declining health. The story I want to relate now took place after her death. There is much more to tell, and if granted time, I will try to relate some of it at a later time, in another venue.

I received a unique gift from my Aunt Virginia some twenty-five years ago; a box of letters she'd saved over the years from 1923 through the 1950's. There were some seventy-five letters she had gotten from her sister Edna, and saved in the box. Mom was 28 when she wrote the first one and about 45 at the last. The packet is a family treasure. I intend to present the letters in some kind of little book for the family to enjoy.

My dear daughter-in-law Gail Serle, my son Bill III's wife, died June 20, 2008. She was fifty-eight years old. She will be missed forever by her husband of twenty years and their two sons Billy IV and Brandon. Even as I wrote this we were in the midst of a mourning period. They made their home in New Smyrna Beach, Florida and we spent a few weeks with them and my son Jeff and his family who live in Ormond Beach.

So the end of life is on my mind. My parents, Edna and Bill resided in Fort Lauderdale at the time of her death. She passed away at the Pompano Hospital and was cremated in Miami.



This, I think, is the house we lived in on East 49th Street in the Flatlands Section of Brooklyn when Dad went to war as an Engineer aboard a Victory Ship. We lived here from about 1942 through 1945.

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Dad was a widower but not over his lifelong love of women. He began to date and over the next year or so I met several women he liked. I was attending the University of Miami in Coral Gables so we didn't live together. We visited as often as possible but mainly he lived a single life. He was only forty seven years old.

Dad was in trouble. The rent on his little home was past due. Rogers and Serle, Dad's company, was failing. They were behind in payments to everybody including the IRS and a lender who extended them Trust Receipt Financing. This kind of financing has a draconian feature which makes it a criminal offence to pay late.

I was struggling at the University of Miami, barely holding my head above water financially. I didn't make the trip to Fort Lauderdale every week as I didn't have a car and was holding two part-time jobs.

When I didn't hear from Dad for a couple of weeks I wasn't surprised but I was troubled when I couldn't get him on the phone. When I called I found that his home phone was disconnected as was the phone at Rogers and Serle. I couldn't find my Uncle Ray who lived in Fort Lauderdale, so I talked my friend Nick Keenan into driving me to Fort Lauderdale to see what was going on.

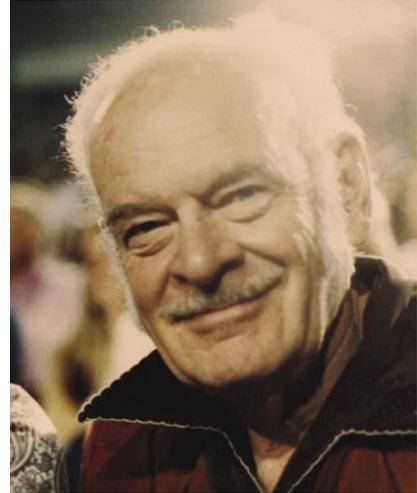
The little cottage was dark and Dad's landlord told me that the police had come and taken my dad away in handcuffs! The rent was unpaid for two months and he'd put Dad's things in boxes and would hold them for a while. He said Dad's car had been repossessed.

I found out that Dad was in the jail on the seventeenth floor of the Dade County Courthouse in Miami and resolved to see him as soon as possible to help him out. This took some doing as I had the two jobs in addition to school, and was strapped for time, money and transportation. Under the circumstances my boss had no problem giving me an afternoon off and I walked across town to the jail.

Sure enough, Dad was there on the seventeenth floor jail at the Dade County Courthouse. We had a nice visit through the wire mesh. He told me not to do anything. He had a hearing in Miami coming up in three days and thought he might be released. He told me some stories about his cell mates and encouraged me to carry on. He kept *my* spirits up!

He was released after about two weeks but had no place to live, no car, no wife, no money, plenty of debt and no job prospects. I bet the economy was in a shambles too. I'm not going to tell you Dad's history here. I'm just saying that his life was messy. He had a lot on his mind.

No wonder he delayed picking up Mom's ashes at the crematory. He was a procrastinator



Dad's smile made him photogenic. He seems around seventy years old in this photograph.

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sometimes.

He picked up the pieces of his life as soon as he could. He found jobs, got married, acquired three step children Sandy (Norman is his given name), Larry, and Nancy. They had a baby. (Welcome Guy Serle.) Dad held two jobs. He worked swing shift as a sewer plant operator for the City of Oakland Park and got a position as a Manufacturer's Representative with the Turbo Ice Company of Denton, Texas.

Dot, my step-mom was a lovely woman but she could be a nudge too. She would mention picking up Edna's ashes to Dad once in a while but years went by and Dad no doubt felt that the ashes might not even be available after too many years on the shelf.

In 1974 – seventeen years after Edna's passing, Dad screwed up his courage and made his way to the mortuary. To his surprise it was still in business in the same Miami industrial area. He drove the twenty or so miles through Fort Lauderdale and Miami traffic and went inside.

The clerk at the front desk didn't bat an eye when Dad asked him for the ashes of Edna Serle. "Certainly sir. Sign here." He turned to a shelf behind the counter, picked up a small, brown-paper-wrapped package and handed it to Dad. And he didn't ask about the delay!

Dad left with Edna's ashes. He was relieved that he didn't have to explain his last seventeen years. Whew!

Edna's ashes stayed in the trunk of Dad's car for many months. Would you believe two years! He wasn't able to take the next step until, eventually, Dot spotted the box in his trunk. It moved indoors to the very top back shelf in young Guy's closet.

Now what? Edna had wanted her ashes scattered in a neighborhood park in Jamaica, New York, where she and young Bill had sat to talk about love and marriage. Not far from the Long Island Railroad's elevated station. But Dad was old and in Florida now. The Park was probably not the romantic venue that Mom remembered from her youth. Dad pictured a littered, drug infested place where he'd have to risk his life to scatter her ashes. So he waited a bit to figure things out.

Years passed and the ashes stayed on the shelf. Dad and Dot grew older. Guy, the youngest, grew up and moved out to work at a job that kept him overseas most of the time.

Sandy, Larry, and Nancy were all in the Air Force. Sandy retired as a full colonel. Nancy took early retirement as a major to raise two girls. Larry stayed for ten years and is currently working for SR Tech-



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nologies a manufacturer of products for government and law enforcement agencies.

Dad and Dot sold their empty nest and moved to a retirement community – Barefoot Bay near Melbourne, Florida. The ashes moved with them. After several years they moved again to North Fort Myers, Florida.

The folks, losing mobility and the energy to solve the problem of Edna's ashes, turned them over to my sister Jan. Action, we thought, was on the horizon.

In their final years Dad and Dot moved in with Jan and Art in McLean, Virginia. Dad passed away in 1993 and his ashes were placed in the National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. He earned this honor by serving in the U.S. Merchant Marine in World War II. There was a moving ceremony when they placed his ashes in the mausoleum: an honor guard and bugle player performed.



Dad's official American flag was folded and given to the widow Dorothea. My siblings, Jan Newburg, Norman (aka Sandy) Grinnell, Larry Grinnell, Guy Serle and Nancy Riley, were in attendance with their children and a few friends. It was a nice send-off.

Dot died a few years later and was interred with Dad along with appropriate ceremony and the attendance of the sisters and brothers and their families. We are all good friends even though the appellations “step and half” are sometimes applied to keep acquaintances oriented. Mostly I think of them all as brothers and sisters.

Time passed and by 2005 Edna would have been 100 years old if she'd lived. She had passed away forty-seven years ago and Jan and I thought it was time to properly put our mother's ashes to rest.

Where? The park in Queens seemed out of the question. We consulted with our brothers and sisters about putting her ashes in with Dad's and Dot's. They were all agreeable to anything Jan and I decided. They understood the questions that arose. The main question was; what would Edna have wanted?

The National Cemetery was the best place in many ways since Edna, as a young woman with two children, had anxiously



waited for Dad's ships to return during the war years. How she must have fretted! Yet we were uncomfortable putting the three of them in there together, and in the end we decided that Lady Bird Johnson Park in Washington, D.C. was the place.

So Daisy and I drove to McLean from our home in Waynesville, North Carolina to help scatter the ashes. We'd decided that since only Jan, Art and I knew Edna, we would not involve the other siblings.

On a sunny, cool afternoon in October 2005, feeling a little uneasy since we thought it possible that there could be rules about scattering human remains on federal land, we drove the beautiful George Washington Parkway to the banks of the Potomac River. There was a squad of twenty or so marines exercising nearby but no sign of the law.

We parked at the foot of the statue of depicting ocean waves with seven seagulls rising all around. We thought that it was just a part of Lady Bird Johnson's park. There we made a discovery. The statue was not just a part of the park but a special memorial. It was The Navy and Marine Memorial honoring Americans who died at sea during World War I. Given Edna's anxious World War II years when dad was at sea, we felt that we'd found the perfect place.

Standing at the base of the statue Jan lovingly strew the ashes in the flower beds. Standing there one has a splendid view of our nation's capital across the Potomac. Mom was at her final resting place. It only took us forty-seven years.

These words are carved into the marble base:

The Navy and Marine Memorial

*To the strong souls and ready valor of those
men of the United States who in the Navy,
the Merchant Marine and
other paths of Activity upon
the waters of the world have given life
or still offer it in the performance of
heroic deeds this monument is
dedicated by a grateful people*

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Mom's story brings to my mind the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

**I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight.**

**I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For, who has sight so keen and strong
That it can follow the flight of song?**

**Long, long afterward, in an oak
I found the arrow, still unbroke;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend.**

Mom did not live a long life but she launched me and my sister with good will and love.
The songs she breathed into the air still reverberate.



Circa 1985 judging by baby Samantha. Frontish - Chris, Gary and Samantha Johnson, Bill III, Kris, Dorathea Serle and Raquel Grinnell, Marisa and Sandy Grinnell. Middle - Billy's girlfriend Cindi Levinson in the checkered jacket, Daisy, Kim, Jan Newburg, Michelle Grinnell, Annie Newburg. Bearded Larry Grinnell, Nancy Grinnell, Kim. Rear - Me Guy Serle, Jeff Serle, Arthur Newburg Dad aand Doug Newburg. Things are changed. Dad and my step-mom Dot are gone now as is Cindi. Doug and Annie are divorced as are Kim and Randy. Check out the next two family photos to see who's new! Who knew.

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2001. Jan and Art's stairway. Back -Larry Grinnell, me Nancy Riley, John Riley, Guy Serle, Tracy Serle, Doug Newburg. Chris Johnson with husband Gary and daughters Samantha, Meg, Jane arrayed in front of her. Nancy and John behind Daisy. Daisy has Maddy Keck in her arms. Kris Keck, Kim Mathews with Jordie in her arms. Michelle and Raquel Grinnell and Art Newburg. Jan Newburg and Sandy Grinnell. Dan Keck holding son Garrison, Guy Serle, Jr., Mackenzie, Ken Mathews and Mirisa Grinnell. Peter Serle, Jennifer and Caitlyn Riley in front. Bill III and Jeff Serle among the missing,



This is a photo of a water color painting I made when I was taking classes from Elizabeth Ellison in Bryson City in about 1980.

Daisy had it framed as a surprise present. While I think the work has some merit, it is not my masterwork - that is yet to come...

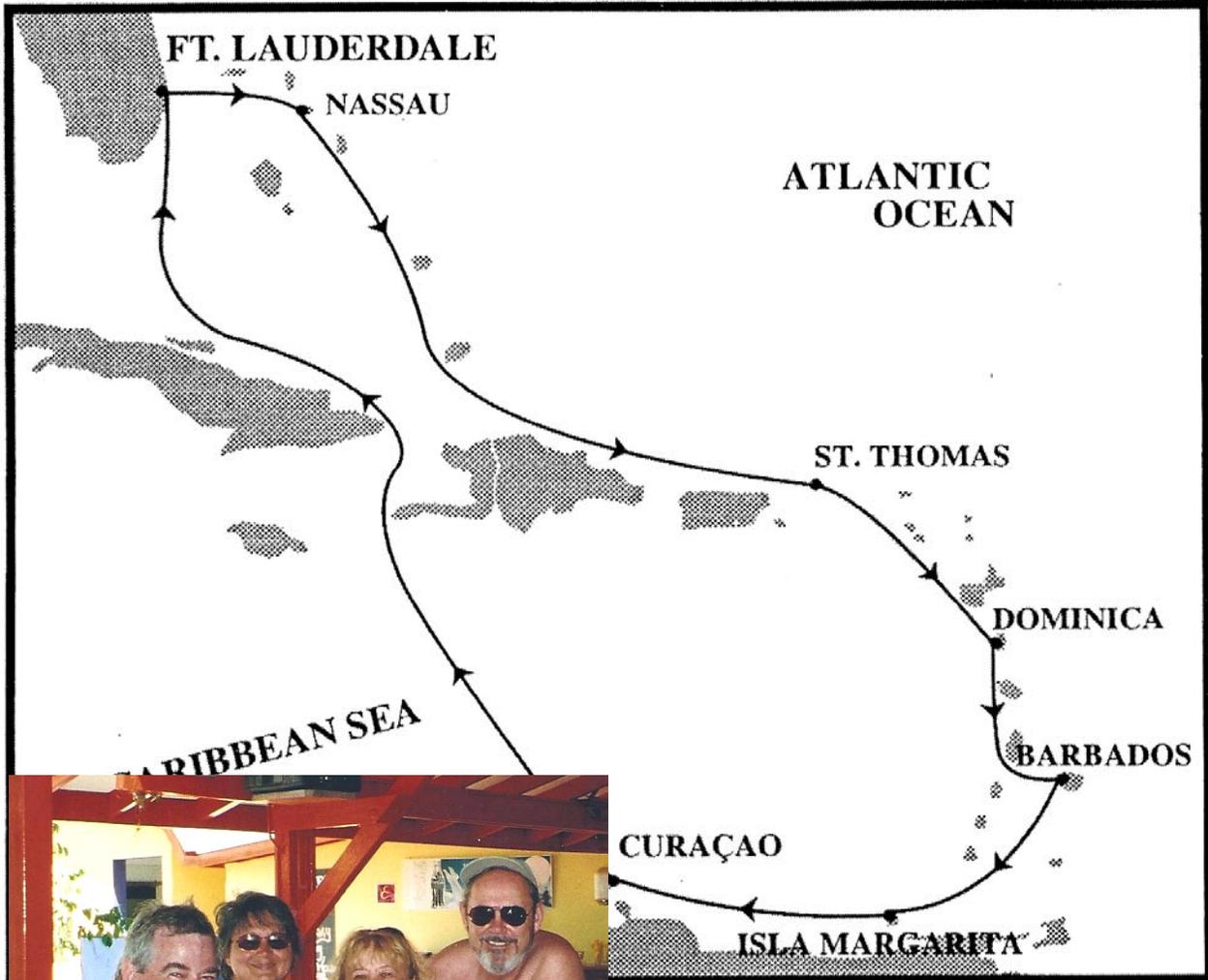
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2006 Family Photo taken by my son-in-law, Ken Mathews. (reddish-brown shirt and glasses in the middle of the second row). Back row (l - r), Jeff Serle holding Jeffie Serle, me, brother Guy Serle, brother Larry Grinnell, Guy Junior, and Tracy Serle. Next row Arthur Newburg, Carol Serle, Melissa Serle in Daisy's arms, Jorden Mitchell, my sister Jan Newburg, Peter Serle, Johnson sisters Jane, Meg, and Samantha. Frontish are brother Sandy Grinnell, Samantha Grinnell, Marisa Grinnell, Nicholas Serle, Raquel Fish, Ken and Kim Mathews, and Samantha Spiller in the arms of Troy Fish. (Absentees are Bill III and Doug Newburg. Taken in Jan and Art's house)

This is a study for a water color painting I began to think about in 2008. I took a painting class at Centenary College. My teacher declared the study done and ordered me to frame it.





Lost in the Caribbean. 2001. The chart above shows our ports of call for Princess of the Sea on our Southern Caribbean Cruise with Norma and Peter. I do not remember where the photo on the left was taken.

2004. Daisy, Norma Joyce and Ofelia in the garden of the first house Norma and Peter rented on their first trip to San Miguel D'Allende, Mexico. (It was actually a home trade I think)

Ofelia was the housekeeper and cook at this house but later came to work for Norma and Peter when they bought a place of their own.

