

## Mother Knows Best



As I have written my memories of my Dad, I feel I owe it to Mother to write down some memories of her too, for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I see her through the filter of my own life with her, but I'll try to see her through her own, or Dad's and my sisters' and brother's eyes as well. This may become an overdue appreciation of Mother.

Before we came on the scene Mother had enjoyed a close family life with brother William (left) and younger sister Cleo (who died young), among many maternal German aunts and grandmother who doted on her. In that family the women ran things, so

Mother knew that she would run things once she had her own family. For more about this, see [www.shaughnessy.us/grandparents.htm](http://www.shaughnessy.us/grandparents.htm)

Mother was always smart, and she should have gone to college, but she had to earn her own living, so she concentrated on learning typing and secretarial skills at Manual High School around Prospect. Getting and holding a job was all she aspired to at the time. (She made sure that we took secretarial courses at Sarachon-Hooley.) For hobbies she liked to swim and sew (and had us take swimming and sewing lessons at Southwest High).



"I began working at 16," she often told us. Her brightness and maturity got her the job in 1920, as a secretary for an automobile agency at 2705 E. 15<sup>th</sup> St. in Kansas City. When she was old enough to drive, the agency provided her with a car so it could claim, "Of course, women can operate automobiles. Why even our secretary has one!"

## A Young Lady with a Car

As a pretty young woman with a car, Mother began to shine among girl friends her own age. She belonged to the Phileo Club, a group of imaginative and clever girls who staged a "mock wedding" in 1923, at which Mother was pictured.

Having a car at her disposal led to her meeting with Dad. She had been asked to chauffeur some girl friends to a Halloween party in Kansas. It was a costume party. Loving clothes, she attired herself as a gypsy, and there she met an Indian chief, Joe Shaughnessy from Kansas City, Kansas. "He just wrapped a blanket around himself and stuck a feather in his hair," she told me. He had graduated from Notre Dame in 1922, (David Shaughnessy has the *Domes* from 1921-1922). He was working for Bob Gornall and living at 928 Tenney Ave in Kansas City, Kansas. They began dating regularly on Wednesday nights. The courtship went on and on and on. Irish men were never in a hurry to marry.

In 1925, not long after they met, he left her for 4 months of European travel, aboard Italian ships, to Italy, Greece, Turkey and Egypt, with an architect friend who just graduated from the University of Illinois, [Homer Pfeiffer](#). Joe wrote his "Frankie" faithfully at the auto agency where she worked, telling her of the wonders he was seeing. Would she give his greetings to her mother. (Where was Mother living? With her family? Was Helen (her mother) permanently back from Texas by then?) These 16 letters and 3 cards were written from places that must have sounded so romantic to her sitting at home on Wednesday nights. Mother must have longed to be with him seeing the sights. Perhaps that was the foundation of their traveling later, which she always said was at her urging. In his letters, he imagined her enjoying herself, going about her activities--swimming, working-but said he knew she was missing him. He told her to hang on for just a short time until he would return home, which he did in late September of 1925, (but not until he had stopped by Washington DC to see the monuments there and in Alexandria, Virginia).

Mother might have hoped that after being separated from her for so long, and expressing longing to see her, he would have rushed home to propose marriage, but no. The courtship went on for three more years. Dad immediately went about getting started in his career, joining the firm of Robert Gornall. In 1927 Dad was again writing her at 1235 E. 84th St. in Cleveland. This time it was she who had gone off and left him, visiting her relatives, probably German aunts Agnes and Mary Poelking. I wonder if she made that visit to prod him into proposing. He teased her that he hoped she didn't enjoy herself, especially if there were young men present. It worked, and they finally did marry in September of 1928 when she was 24 and Dad was 31. I like to imagine that she got him to propose, and that she (who always prided herself on the fact that she worked and could afford to do things) may even have paid for the wedding. There are alas no pictures of the wedding, only an engagement. I wrote a story, "The Mock Wedding," about this period of courtship as I imagined it.

Dad's letters to Mother from his European grand tour reveal someone who didn't want to miss anything great and famous in the way of world art or architecture. He must have known she was thinking of him every minute, but great architecture came first. Companionship (including hers) he took for granted, but Mother didn't. He always had companions to go out with when she was out of

town. Although he mentioned missing her when she was in Cleveland, he went right on to tell her what he and his siblings—Andrew, Marguerite, Nell Shaughnessy, Nell Sullivan Spellman and husband Leonard Spellman or Ruth--were up to. There was always someone dropping by in a car for Dad. No wonder he wasn't as eager to get married as she was. He had a large family around him. No wonder he was gregarious and enjoyed being around people all his life, and didn't favor some over others, while Mother was more particular and exclusive. She had a small family who stuck together. This was what she preferred. Her family was best. But she was lucky that Dad had a lot of sisters and a dominating mother (Rose Butler Shaughnessy Sullivan); he was used to letting women be in charge.

### Marriage and Family

When Mother and Dad finally married, she found herself but one among a large family--the Butler-Sullivan-Shaughnessy clan. She was welcomed into that family but wasn't singled out for special attention as she had been in her own family, where she is obviously adored. Someone who signed only "Butler" (Joe Butler Sr. probably). sent her a wedding gift of \$5 at 5746 Harrison (Aunt Hannah's). That wasn't a very special gift, she thought. Perhaps that is why she liked to criticize Dad's family to us.

When we came along, she had her hands full. I came first and she privately told me that I was very special, as she had to wait three long years for me. I have told this to Kathleen and Carol but they don't believe me, of course, because Mother always stressed that she was impartial and didn't favor any of us. I knew I was her favorite. Otherwise, why did she pick on me? Wasn't she intent upon seeing that I turned out the way she hoped. The rest came in rapid succession--4 children in six years. Fortunately, Dad built a new house for us, with more bedrooms and bathrooms.



Kathleen and I were only a year apart and Mother dressed us alike and made sure that we did everything together. We roomed together all the time we were at home. My side of the room was messy; I am told, whereas Kathleen's was always immaculately neat. Buddy had his own room which we only occasionally glanced in. When Carol came along, another bedroom was added over the back porch for Kathleen and me, and Carol got the large front bedroom to herself.

Kathleen and I were Mother's domestic helpers—in theory at least. She gave us the unpleasant jobs—daily dishwashing (no dishwashers in those days), weekly ironing, cleaning the bathrooms, scrubbing the kitchen floor. In return for this we got 25 cents a week to spend anywhere we wished—at the movies at Brookside every Saturday afternoon. She gave Buddy the easy outside jobs of trash-

handling and grass-cutting. Carol, only 5 years younger; got away with murder, we thought. She was always “too young” to be called on to help us. By the time we went away to school and her turn had finally come, Mother had a car, a cleaning lady, and a new house with a dishwasher! Carol learned to use all the modern appliances in the new house plus drive the car! By Kathleen and my standards, Carol was thoroughly spoiled.

Mother knows best. She was too smart for us to try and get away with anything. As a stay-at-home mother, she seemed to be always watching us, telling us what to do, expecting us to obey without question-- clean up our rooms, go to the store, do the dishes. In our grade school years, we were constantly fighting. We were “hellions”. “Buddy did it,” we wailed. “No, I didn’t,” he shouted. Mother wouldn’t decide; she would let Dad decide who was to blame. When Dad came home, he would have none of our quarrels. He had had a hard day and wanted peace. Having Dad come home was like having company! He laid his plans down on a sideboard in the kitchen, hung up his coat and went into the living room to sit down and wait for Mother to bring him a glass of sherry as if he were a guest. The focus shifted away from our fights to the outside world—to libraries and schools and churches—and to the affairs of other people--contractors, priests, bishops, not just us and the neighbors. Our lives expanded. Mother or one of us might blame some mischief on me or Buddy, but Dad would have none of it. She liked tidbits about people, but Dad waved gossip aside. When he came home, he brought peace with him. I liked to listen, standing behind his chair, combing his hair. Still we fought, even when he was there. He sometime waited till after we had gone to bed to come home. “Are the children in bed yet?” he would ask. He couldn’t stand being brought down to the tedium of our daily lives.

Mother didn’t have a car, so she focused her attention on structuring our lives. We girls all became pretty disciplined—made our beds, did our homework, completed our chores. Then, after that, she let us out of the house to play in the neighborhood around our house at 65<sup>th</sup> and Cherry, or walk to the library at Southwest High over at 65<sup>th</sup> and Wornall, or go to Brookside Shopping Center to buy milk or bread. Shopping was fun—Mother liked to shop; in fact it was the main form of fun we had with her. If we couldn’t walk, we could take the street car that ran along Wornall and Brookside north to the Downtown, where she would take us shopping to Harzfeld’s on Main Street. Kansas City had an active downtown and good transportation then. On Sundays, Dad could take us in the car to family dinners with Aunt Meal and Uncle Fred Daly and Aunt Hannah (until she died) and Jack and Fred Daly (who were priests), and sometimes the Garies uncles—Herb and Leo, and our Garies cousins. Mother was all about her family. We didn’t see much of Dad’s big fun family, Sometimes these afternoons ended with a stop at the Country Club Dairy for an ice cream cone.

Mother structured her own life too. Without a car, she spent her time at home working--cooking, canning (bushels of vegetables from Clyde), but especially

sewing She loved to sew and made most of our clothes. She made us new skirts and dresses, even suits. I still remember with what joy she purchased a new sewing machine. Very occasionally she would buy us a dress or sweater. Her greatest delight was to make dresses for graduation or dances or proms. We girls grew up knowing how to sew; and Mother would become so involved in her or our sewing projects that she didn't miss not going out often. Kathleen and Carol and I all loved craft projects and can get so engrossed in interesting projects at home that we don't need to go out, and in fact turn down invitations to go out. She also saw to it that we learned to type (as she had), at the Sarachon-Hooley Business School. Kathleen also learned shorthand.

### **Mother Knows Best, but So Do I**

Of all of her children, I admit I probably caused Mother the most grief, and she often reminded me of it. We were too much alike. We both knew best. Mother may have known what was best for our family, but I knew what was best for **me**. I wasn't lazy or disobedient, after all; I just had my own opinions and held to them, from the time I was young. I was just as stubborn as she was. When I was about 8 and had a disagreement with her, I threatened to run away. She came up to the bedroom to help me pack my bag. I could never win with Mother. She could say cruel things. She put me in my place, but not the way Dad did. His comments just applied to the matter at hand. Hers often were laced with insinuations about my character. She was emotional; Dad was reasonable. I was emotional too. It was raw emotion vs. raw emotion. The only way to move beyond a fight with Mother was to collapse in tears and beg her pardon.

Mother was emotionally frustrated, I decided later. She was complicated and Dad was simple. He probably wasn't responding to her emotional needs, just as he didn't listen to her trials when he came home. He didn't want to hear her problems. She felt he let her down. Dad didn't help her at all! He even brought home more work for her to do from the office. Didn't he know that she already had enough work with 4 quarrelsome children (including one uncooperative daughter)? Kathleen picked up on Mother's emotional needs early and didn't give her any trouble. Bud and I resisted. I should have shut up like Kathleen, but I couldn't hold my comments, and Mother and I always got into it. I would get so mad at Kathleen, who would always side with Mother. I felt thwarted emotionally. I had no allies. Buddy was hopeless; I cultivated Carol, but she was too young to take my part. She was so cute, I just loved her and she gave me support that way, as a pet. I converted my anger and sorrow into spirituality. God would be on my side. I went to church every day. I turned to literature for solace, reading animal books and projecting my struggles onto dogs and horses. Eventually, when I graduated from seventh grade, I got a dog, Robin, who became my ally. Mother and I both liked Robin. In high school I turned to poetry, memorizing Lord Byron, as I was doing the ironing on Saturday mornings. I was "the prisoner of Chillon." Later, when I was an English major studying the Romantics, I recognized "the romantic agony."

Mother and Dad had a lot of neighbor friends, people from St. Peter's parish—the Schweigers and Tierneys, the Ganey's and Lewis's, as well as the Wiedemans. There were evening parties at their houses or ours, where the adults played cards and drank highballs and laughed a lot downstairs, and we listened from our bedrooms upstairs.

### **Mother Approves**

Once we were finally in high school, things turned around in my favor. Mother gave us more freedom. Our lives expanded. Friends came over after school or in the evenings, and she made popcorn and lemonade and cookies for us. She stayed nearby, listening while we joked and played the piano or lay on the floor in front of the fire eating popcorn. She liked our girl and boy friends and made dresses for dances and wanted us to look pretty and be popular. Formal dresses were her specialty. I was always proud that my mother could make my dresses, and hung onto my senior prom dress until it was yellow with age. My high school memories at Hogan are all happy; whereas my grade school memories are grim. Conflict never left our relationship, though. She wanted to manage me, but I wouldn't let her. "You know, I can't sleep at night, worrying about you," she said. I never gave her any cause for worry, so I didn't know what she meant. I never felt guilty.

When I went away to St. Mary's College, an all girls' school, she was glad I would be looked after by the nuns and my rebellious streak wouldn't get me into trouble. She was faithful about sending me boxes of cookies and doing my laundry (I sent it home in boxes!) She wanted me to have pretty clothes for college. When I went back to South Bend to join the Holy Cross community right after I graduated, she must have heaved a great sigh of relief. But also she really missed me; she told me that she wished we could do over the last shopping expedition, when I had to look for items I was required to bring, like Birdseye diapers --the convent's replacement for Kotex. (We actually used them as dust rags.)

### **Expanding Life and Family in Mission Hills**

Mother didn't miss me for long. She had three other children to look after and manage—Kathleen, who went to Fontbonne, then to KU; and Carol, who had had a tennis accident her first year at St. Mary's and stayed home a semester, and finished at Fontbonne in St. Louis. Mother was happy to have them closer to home, and to enjoy their social lives. Joe went to Rockhurst, then Notre Dame where he was during my senior year and years in the novitiate. She and Dad made trips to South Bend to see him at ND (Dad's alma mater) and to come over to visit me in the Novitiate, or to other places where I was assigned after I was professed in 1955.

By then they had moved to Mission Hills, to a lovely new contemporary home designed by Dad, with every modern convenience and a two car garage, as they both had cars. Mother's life expanded exponentially during those years. Her



entertaining and travel expanded. Her social life expanded. Her children's social lives expanded. Those were the best years of her life: the wedding and grandchildren era. In 1957, Mother enjoyed planning Kathleen's wedding to Dick Connor in 1957; that same year Joe married Pat Graney. The following year, 1958, was a great year for Mother. Two grandchildren arrived, followed by another wedding. Kathleen and Dick presented her

with her first grandchild, Keith Richard Connor on March 31; Pat and Joe brought her Michael Shaughnessy on May 6; and in June, Carol married Bob Miller.

### Grandchildren

Thereafter, grandchildren became Mother's focus. Mother was in her element as new babies began arriving almost yearly. After Keith, came Keith Brian (1960), Kevin (1962), Brennan (1965), Malachy (1968) and Mary Kate (1971). After Michael, Mary Rose (1963), and David (1968) arrived. Carol and Bob had Sean (1959), Therese (1960), Matt (1962), and Marie (1964).



Mother enjoyed being a grandmother more than she had a mother. Children had caused her anxiety. She had to correct them constantly. Grandchildren caused her no anxiety. Her grandchildren were all perfect; she never had to correct them. I never heard her utter a critical word. She didn't have any favorites. They all grew up loving her. She drew immense pleasure from visiting them, baby-sitting for them, giving them gifts, and entertaining them. She carried on the tradition

of family dinners that she had gotten from her grandmother and aunts, and collected all the family at her home for years.

Although her children were married (or in the convent), Mother continued to manage their lives when possible. Attendance was required at family dinners on Seneca. Not everyone was on time for these dinners. Joe felt freer in his attendance than either Kathleen or Carol. As the only son, he could get





away with it. While Kathleen and Carol were expected to arrive on the dot of 5 for dinner, Joe could arrive at 6 or later, and Mother would wait dinner for him and be glad to see him. Mother never objected to his late appearances, but Kathleen and Carol, who had rushed to get their children dressed in time to show up at 5, noticed.

I missed those early dinners, and only heard about them years later, after I left the convent. But that was 14 years later—I missed all those good years of weddings and new babies, and only kept up via letters and “home visits” in August. Mother structured those visits, planning ahead who we would visit. She had everything pre-arranged, when we would visit and with Kathleen, Carol, and Joe and Pat, where and with whom we would eat. I was glad she took charge. I was completely dependent on her. I am so grateful that she had kept these family get-togethers going. I certainly benefited from them. These were joyful times for all of us, seeing the grandchildren grow. Mother’s life was full. She was in her element!

## Travel

Mother was very smart, as we all knew. Dick even called her “brilliant.” “She could remember the smallest article about who died.” She could tell great stories and remember the punch line. We could ask her anything and she would know something about it. She took her intelligence for granted. It was not a thing she ever boasted of, except to tell us that she had a better business head than Dad. She assumed that she knew what was best for us. She took charge of her life with Dad, including their investments and apartment portfolio. She took risks for herself and Dad, and made money for him that he would never have made, as he would have put all his earnings into bonds, or not have charged for the clergy jobs, probably, if Mother hadn’t been after him. She was against any of us taking risks on our own, however, unless it was buying real estate, and we usually sought out her advice. Kathleen and Carol had husbands to protect them against taking foolish risks, but she worried about Joe and me.

Traveling was the kind of risk Mother liked. Dad was more conservative than she, but she knew that Dad would enjoy himself. “Your father doesn’t want to travel, but he always enjoys himself when he gets there,” she confided to us. She liked traveling in first class. Dad’s first tour of Europe had been made on a bicycle. She



would not have enjoyed that. He would have been satisfied with the places I would stay in. She wouldn't meet the right type of people there. No, they stayed at the best hotels, the Grand Bretagne, for example, in Athens. Mother and Dad went on some cruises, including one on the Queen Mary that included Joe and Pat and Mike. They liked to visit the cities, not the country side, and mostly in Europe or Mexico. But they expanded to include Egypt and even Iran, visiting Teheran, which American tourists are no longer inclined to visit. We were not surprised when we heard they were going on a round the world trip. Dad traveled to see and photograph monuments and landscapes, she to socialize and shop. One of their cruises to Europe was in the company of Cardinal Cody and his "cousin" Helen Wilson, whom Mother liked, saying she was a lot of fun.

When Mother traveled, she liked to find several congenial couples among the other travelers with whom she and Dad could enjoy themselves, eating, laughing and telling stories as they drank their highballs. She could get everyone laughing. I have never seen her enjoy herself as much as when she was performing for strangers. I don't think we were enough of an audience for her. She deserved more, so she traveled to find her audiences.

### **Worrying about Me Again**

Although I had no husband to protect me, at least I was in the convent, and some superiors were looking after me. Mother didn't have to stay awake at night worrying about me. She had been coming to visit me at the various missions where I was assigned and would tell my local superiors, "I'm glad you're looking after her. Keep her working. She likes to be busy." When I complained about being moved from a mission I liked, she was alarmed. Was I showing my rebel streak to my convent superiors, she wondered. "Just be grateful that they let you do as much as you do. Why did you ask to be transferred?" She didn't want to hear my complaints. But she could see that all was not as she had hoped regarding me, that I was not happy. When I left the convent in 1966, she wasn't particularly surprised. She was surprised I lasted as long as I did. Wasn't I always a rebellious child? But her worries about me began all over again.

Dad couldn't understand why I would want to leave. He wept. What was happening in the Church? If I would leave the convent, the Church must be falling apart. That was one thing I loved about my Dad. If any of us did something, we added immensely to the enterprise; they were lucky to have us. How could the Church go on without me? Finally, Joe's friend from Rockhurst, the popular Father Lakas, reassured Dad. The Church was not falling apart. The Second Vatican Council had revised a lot of old ideas about how to serve God. One could be a lay person and serve the Church just as well as in the convent. Why, Dad was a lay person who served the Church, wasn't he? From then on, Dad felt sorry when he saw nuns still in the convent.

I was always grateful to Mother for understanding me then and helping me get on my feet. She gave me \$1000 seed money to get started in the PhD program the University of Chicago (I borrowed money from the University after that). And when the opportunity came for me to accompany Joe and Pat to Spain in 1967, the summer after I left the convent, she staked me to that trip. Travel, like real estate, was a good investment.

Her idea of a successful woman, though, was not a university professor—which I intended to become—but a married woman with a husband and children, like my two sisters. They had stayed home, in Kansas City, looking after their wonderful husbands and lovely children, and in return, they were **looked after** and **secure**. They had nice homes and cars, and they played bridge and tennis in their spare time. Meanwhile I was living in a big city—perhaps walking alone, at night.

The University of Chicago was a big urban university, not even Catholic. People studied there from all parts of the world. I had always shown an interest in foreigners. She imagined that I would meet and fall under the influence of some unsavory foreigner, possibly even from Africa! That thought kept her awake at night. When I brought Dan to Kansas City for a visit, she was relieved that he was a Catholic, and asked him to **look after** me. Then she came to Chicago for a visit and found I was dating Tony. Although he wasn't a Catholic, and he was a Greek, he was nice. Would he please **look after** me? Then there was Bob. He wasn't a foreigner, and he too was nice. Would he please make sure that I didn't go around at night alone? Was ever any daughter so worried about?

When I finished my course work and got a job as an assistant professor of English at Chicago State University in 1968, she was relieved. Thank heavens! At least I had a job. But when I moved to South Shore, and lived in what I thought was a lovely apartment there on 70<sup>th</sup> Place and Crandon where I lived from 1967-1973, she took one look at the racially-mixed-and-rapidly-becoming-predominately-black neighborhood and sounded the alarm. She wrote me a very serious letter telling me that I would never meet anyone there (i.e., anyone of whom she approved), and that no one would want to come and visit me there. The sooner I moved, the better. Later, after I did move, I wished she had shown her instinct for real estate and advised me to buy up the apartment building I lived in. The 21-unit building was sold for \$160,000 to the Croatian janitor, who could later resell each unit for what he paid for the whole building.



When I finally got my PhD and with it tenure at Chicago State in 1973, she was overjoyed. She could get some sleep. When I complained about my teaching job, she was afraid I would get fired. “You should be glad you have a job.”

When that fall of 1973 I found a condo in Hyde Park, her joy knew no bounds; they would lend me \$13,000 toward the purchase. At least she didn't have to worry about my

neighborhood any more. Many happy visits to my place followed. “This was the best investment you ever made,” she told me many times. My market value had gone up, and all it took was real estate.

Whenever I visited Kansas City, I was welcome to stay with them. She would introduce me, “This is my daughter, Mary Rose from Chicago—with a condo overlooking Lake Michigan.” It was a family joke that she couldn’t wait until I came home, and then after I’d been there a day, she couldn’t wait until I would leave. Of course, as soon as I left, she began worrying again.

Once I had a PhD, I became interested in new things—traveling, or doing art. I wouldn’t settle down. In her mind, I was looking for something I would never find, something over the rainbow. I went from one boyfriend to the next, and from one enthusiasm to the next. When she came to visit me, she got together with Gerda (an older German lady who also lived at the Barclay) and talked about me. “She won’t settle down,” Mother complained to Gerda. “She’s an *unruhige seele*, a restless soul,” Gerda agreed. It was like being criticized by my mother **and** my mother-in-law.

### **A Home on the Plaza**

After those wonderful years at the home in Seneca, they moved (no doubt at Mother’s suggestion) to the Regency apartment on the Plaza, which was not as large as their home on Seneca, and did not offer the table space for large family dinners. When the grandchildren grew too numerous, Kathleen or Carol took over the hosting, and Mother expected them to show Joe the same deference.

Mother managed Dad’s life as well. She had always told him where to spend his money, starting from what things to pick up on the way home from work. She gradually told him everything to buy from clothes (he always looked well-dressed), to apartments. She had learned the value of real estate from her mother, and saw to it that Dad bought a portfolio of small apartments. After he retired in 1967 at age 70, these apartments occupied his time. He had to keep working, and the apartments were work he enjoyed. He met with the electricians or the plumbers regarding repairs. On Saturdays he saw to it that the grandsons cut the grass and emptied the trash and cleaned the basements and the perimeters of the buildings. Dad acknowledged his gratitude that Mother had gotten him into these. He knew that he couldn’t just sit home much less play golf.

### **Joe**

I have already said that Buddy (who grew up to be Joe) escaped Mother’s management. He was free to come whenever he wanted to the dinners. She really didn’t understand Joe, but she never said anything. She especially didn’t understand Joe and Pat’s casual, unstructured style of life. She didn’t

communicate with them every day the way she did with Carol and Kathleen, so she didn't know what their plans were or whether they would be at home on Sunday, her visiting day, when she would have liked to see them. She always made plans and invited others over and expected others to make plans and invite her over in return. Joe and Pat didn't invite. They just stopped by and expected others to stop by. Mother would never just stop by, as Joe and Pat's friends did. When there was a party at Joe and Pat's, e.g., a celebration of Dad's August birthday, Mother didn't know whether Pat would have planned a menu, so she would always take the dinner over. She tried to be positive about their life style, though it was so different from hers and Dad's. She didn't like controversy, and she didn't express her preferences among her children.

She had to bite her tongue not to comment on several projects of Joe. Not content with being an architect, he decided to run for councilman-at-large in Kansas City. She didn't think this was a good idea, she told me. Pat had started an architectural salvage business in the Olde Theater on Westport, which became Joe's (and Dad's) office. Bob Miller owned a building on Madison and the Southwest Traffickway that Joe used for his campaign headquarters. It was all becoming too much for Mother to keep track of all Joe and Pat's affairs. Didn't they already spend too much time away from the family and in the community? Wouldn't these ventures take even more time away? She could not tell them this, of course; she could only tell us. But Joe won, and Pat's business did well and employed some of the teenagers in Roanoke. Mother celebrated along with everyone else. She knew that they would now have a better excuse for coming late or not showing up for family get-togethers, but she wouldn't criticize them. She would brag about them instead. I never actually heard her say "My son, the councilman." Or "My daughter-in-law, the proprietor of the Olde Theater," but she probably did.

Another mystery to Mother was why Joe would get entangled with our cousin Bud Johnson. Bud was a bit of a high-flyer, as far as Mother was concerned. He spent a lot of money, but she couldn't figure out where he got it. She suspected his businesses were shady. When she heard that Joe and Bud were planning on opening a liquor store on the Plaza, to be called Plaza Spirits, she was alarmed. Bud made it sound like a lot of fun, and Joe entered into the vision. He was a risk-taker. All Mother could see was financial ruin. They borrowed money to open the store, renovate it, stock it and then had to pay monthly rent. On the Plaza, where rents were high! She couldn't believe that it would succeed. If it failed, she was sure Joe would be left holding the bag. Bud Johnson was even talking to Joe about buying a farm together. Horrors! What on earth for? But Joe was a free spirit and she couldn't manage him. Imagine Mother's despair when Brush Creek flooded the Plaza in 1977 and Plaza Spirits' was inundated. Their entire stock of wines and much of the liquor was condemned.

Between Joe and me, Mother could barely keep up with all the worrying she had to do. In 1977 I told her that I was going to study Interior Design, downtown at

Harrington Institute, two or three nights a week, in a three year program. Now, why did I need to do that? What was I thinking? Wasn't I satisfied with teaching? Wasn't one job enough? Why night school? Wasn't it unsafe to go down town in Chicago at night?

Her worries about me, however, were forgotten that spring when Joe had a seizure that revealed a dendritic brain tumor. After surgery, he was left completely without those skills which control the basic executive functions; he was aphasiac, he couldn't recall names, read or write or count, much less practice architecture. She refused to accept the diagnosis that his cancer was terminal. She offered folk remedies and supplements. Perhaps he had a potassium deficiency. Bananas had lots of potassium, so she fed him bananas. She brought one home remedy after another, whether it was useful or not. She needed to feel she was doing something to help. She couldn't imagine life without Joe. And she worried about Pat. And Mike (19), Mary (14), and David (9)--who would look after them? The whole structure of her life seemed to be collapsing. But Joe and Pat's unstructured lifestyle and wide circle of friends helped them cope. Friends dropped by to help out and do things for Joe. In Mother's world, she could only imagine family helping family, but here were neighbors and friends stopping by, helping, feeding. She couldn't understand it, but it worked.

She was distressed by the casual way she imagined Joe was being treated. She would have taken all his autonomy away from him and waited on him, shaved him, dressed him, driven him about, but Pat gave him as much autonomy as she could. "Joe was always so careful about his appearance," Mother said to me. "He was always well-groomed and fastidious. Now, he goes out in jeans and work shirts. He shouldn't be allowed to dress himself." Joe had lost weight and few of his clothes fit him. I went along shopping with him for new jeans and was shocked to see how dependent he was. Since he could no longer drive, he needed to take the buses. Mary went with him, paying his fare, as he couldn't count. I felt his humiliation, but it didn't bother him or Mary, or Pat. Keeping up appearances had never meant anything to Joe and Pat's circle of friends. Joe's appearance—his uniform of jeans, a plaid shirt and a watch cap (covering the scar from his surgery and the baldness from chemo and radiation), upset Mother, but it was fine among his friends.



When it became clear that Joe was not going to recover, that the glioma was fatal; that when the doctor said the cancer was dendritic and terminal, he was telling the truth, Mother sought consolation in reading John Cardinal Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*. The words with which the angel consoled the dying spirit resonated with Mother:

SOFTLY and gently, dearly-ransomed soul,  
In my most loving arms I now enfold thee,

And, o'er the penal waters, as they roll,  
I poise thee, and I lower thee, and hold thee.

And carefully I dip thee in the lake,  
And thou, without a sob or a resistance,  
Dost through the flood thy rapid passage take,  
Sinking deep, deeper, into the dim distance.  
Angels, to whom the willing task is given,  
Shall tend, and nurse, and lull thee, as thou liest;  
And Masses on the earth and prayers in heaven,  
Shall aid thee at the Throne of the most Highest.

Farewell, but not forever! Brother dear,  
Be brave and patient on thy bed of sorrow;  
Swiftly shall pass thy night of trial here,  
And I will come and wake thee on the morrow.

Farewell, but not forever! After Joe died in October, 1978, Mother's life was never the same. She was 74. Her only son was gone. She was weary of this life and looked forward to being reunited with him in death and heaven one day. She often said things like, "What does it matter? Do what you like." It was sad to see the fight gone out of her. She continued the routines of family get-togethers, but Joe would never show up late again. She turned to her grandchildren for consolation. As they grew older, Joe's children shared their loss with her. David would come over and sit beside her and put his arm around her, without saying anything. Michael would call and have long conversations with her.

Mother's women friends also were dying. Her life became more limited. She always loved to read, and fortunately the Plaza public library was just a short walk down the hill to Main from their apartment at the Regency. Ellis Peters was one of her favorite writers. She could also walk down to Wornall across Brush Creek to the Plaza with its multitude of stores. Dad may have had the office to go to, but Mother had the Plaza. In 1979 Dad received an AIA award for St. Francis Xavier for extended use; I kidded her that the Plaza might give her an award.

### **Life Is Not Over**

There were still many joys for Mother after Joe's death. Her grandchildren's lives



and milestones occupied her interest —graduations from grade school, then high school, then college. Gradually the grandchildren began to marry. The first was Keith Connor who married Mary Beth Hudak in Pittsburgh in 1981. Sean Miller married Karen Huss in Arvada Colorado in 1982; in

that same year, Therese married Richard Greene from St. Louis. Matt Miller married Sandy Fuller in Palm Beach in 1984. Mike Shaughnessy married Malory Otteson in Kansas City in 1987. Brennan Connor married Kari Kleinschmidt in 1989. Kevin Connor married Anne Bolen from Salina in 1991, and Malachy Connor married Jennifer Jarvis in 1991. (They were later divorced and he remarried Kilmeny Waterman, but Mother didn't live to see that.) David Shaughnessy married Laura Sandy in 1997, which Mother missed, nor did she live to see Mary Kate Connor married to Eric Rubin in 2002. In 2001, Mary Beth died. And of course, great-grandchildren began to come, and she enjoyed them and their lives. She and Dad are at the center of many huge family pictures of the Connors and Millers.

But her work on her children was done. They were successes. She was a success. All that remained was to care for Dad. Mother had always managed Dad when he wasn't at work, planning not only his meals but also his social life, especially travel, for him. She told him when he should go and when he shouldn't go. After Mother and Dad had stopped traveling, in their 80's, Kathleen and Dick would have liked to take them on one of their trips, but Mother said no; Dad needed to stay near his doctors.

### **Doctors**

Mother was the one who went to doctors frequently. She was a near-hypochondriac about her own health. We grew up knowing about her high blood pressure. "You children raise my blood pressure," she said, to get us to shut up. She took blood pressure pills. She had "nerves." She eventually found a doctor to prescribe some "don't give a damn" pills. She had osteoporosis and her back often bothered her. She complained of other mysterious aches and pains. She blamed the swine flu virus inoculation for various mysterious maladies. She visited many doctors looking for cures. Carol and Kathleen both say her file was huge.

Dad never worried about his health; he never complained. He had the blood pressure and pulse of a teenager. Mother took credit for his excellent health. She saw to it that he took his "dizzy pills" every day. Since he wouldn't complain, she complained for him. "You don't see him at home. He is jolly in front with people, but at home he's as weak as a baby. Society takes a lot out of him." (She was energized by society.) She knew that we would not listen to her personal complaints, having heard them so often, but we would listen to complaints about Dad's health. He was a vicarious way for her to get sympathy. Most conversations had the line, "Your father doesn't worry about these things, but I do." Kathleen, Carol and I have all reacted by avoiding doctors whenever possible. "Carol never complains," Kathleen often tells me, and the same can be said of her.

Perhaps Mother was a bit jealous of Dad. Dad was genuinely interested in other people. Mother was chiefly interested in her family, and even there her interest was limited. When I called them every Saturday morning to talk, Mother wasn't really interested in what I was doing—just more to worry about. No, she wanted to talk to me about Dad. “Everyone thinks your father is so charming, but. . .” was a refrain we heard a lot. Kathleen called her every day, and, again, she wasn't interested in hearing what Kathleen was up to. Rather she would start, “Your father . . . “

When Dad retired, Mother stopped driving and let him drive her. She took over planning his days for him— where they would go, whom they should visit, to which doctor he should drive her. Without him driving her, she would have been shut down. When Dad was 90, he even bought a new car. While it was still new, she decided that Dad shouldn't drive it any longer, that Kathleen should have it. She could use it and maintain it if she would drive Dad to Bob's office every day, or take them to places they needed to go. Her daily conversations with Kathleen became arrangements regarding when to pick him or them up, or whether it was too rainy or icy for him to go to work.

As they grew too old to look after themselves, they briefly tried living in a retirement home, Manor Square, when Mother hurt her back and had to use a walker. She immediately resolved to get out of there, and hired Erminia to look after them, cook and take care of them while they stayed on at the Regency. That continued for a few years. In the fall of 1991 Mother began to forget things and to show signs of dementia. She imagined that Erminia was after Dad. She saw her reflection and asked who that old woman walking in the apartment was. Dad was lost. He had always depended on Mother from the beginning of their marriage. She had encouraged his dependency. Mother knows best was his philosophy too. She had chosen his clothes, planned his social life, told him where to go every day when he wasn't at work, planned his meals and his travels. Without her intelligence supervising their lives, he was lost.

Kathleen and Carol and Pat helped where they could, but Dad was left day by day to watch Mother deteriorate. This was the saddest part of his life—to watch the woman who was so sharp decline. He somewhat let himself go and Erminia told Kathleen that he wasn't taking showers or caring about himself. She asked him to please keep himself up.

I was on sabbatical that whole year, so came to Kansas City several times. Without seeing the gradual decline that Carol and Kathleen and Pat were witnessing, I was shocked when I came and spent the afternoon with Mother. Sometimes she knew who I was but didn't talk. She lay on the sofa curled up. Other times she thought I was her mother. When I went back to Kathleen's that night and felt sick. How could Dad take it day after day?

In May of 1992 Dad had a stroke, which I wrote about in my memoir about him. I won't go over that period again, except that Mother didn't know what was going on. She was there, but not there. She knew something was wrong when she saw so many family and strangers converging on their apartment. She thought that we were on TV and there were camera men coming to see Dad. We didn't tell her that Dad had died.

Erminia continued to care for Mother for the rest of the summer and into the fall. Finally, Carol decided that she would bring Mother over to her house and look after her there and would let Erminia go. There were many people who would want to have Erminia who would appreciate her. Mother was barely conscious of her presence.

Carol took charge of disbanding the apartment at the Regency and moving Mother out to her house in October, 1992. I was in Chicago when they moved her in an ambulance on a Friday. Saturday Carol called and said, "Listen to this," and held the phone up to Mother so I could hear her breathing. "What does that sound like? Is that what they call a 'death rattle'?" I heard Mother's very labored struggling breaths. That was the last I ever heard, for she died the next day. We say, "Carol, you killed Mother by moving her out to your house." But really, she did Mother a favor. Wouldn't we all rather die than live on in that state? I surely would. "Now she's with Dad and Joe," we told each other.

At her funeral in Visitation Church, all the family—children, grandchildren and great grandchildren came. Behind the family members were two empty rows. Therese Greene, Carol's older daughter, said she saw Aunt Meal and Aunt Hannah, and all Mother's family sitting there and talking and laughing. How did Therese even know about those Aunts who died before she was born? But I like the image of Aunt Hannah and Aunt Meal and Uncle Fred, and Jack Daly and the unknown ancestors escorting Mother into paradise.



