

Finding My Ashland 'Grandparents'

By Laurel Ann (nee: Scriptor) Strieby

To me, growing up in Ashland, Oregon in the 1940s and 1950s was similar to growing up in a Norman Rockwell painting or Andy Griffith's Mayberry. It was a slow, easy way of life and I have many fond memories of living at 283 Scenic Drive. Our house was white with green shutters and a large porch graced the front. Our property stretched up the hillside for nearly half an acre, I believe, with an abundance of flower beds, fruit trees, a huge garden and a white picket fence in the middle. Mom had a green thumb and the knack for knowing how to plant flowers so that something beautiful was always blooming. I loved living there.

My family's social life consisted of gatherings of neighbors, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other assorted relatives and friends. Most of our get-togethers were with family and because there were usually around twenty-five or thirty or more of us living in Ashland at one time, most gatherings were held in our home because it was the largest. There were my Uncle Paul Retter (principal of Belleview School) and aunt Gertrude and my two cousins, my aunt Vida Scriptor (Ashland Jr. High Social Studies teacher and well-known performer of the 'molecule dance'), my uncle and aunt Fred and Hazel West and my four cousins, my great aunt Ruth Retter, my great uncle and aunt Hugh and Marie McKeever and their daughter, Mickey. Other aunts, uncles, cousins, and family members moved in and out of Ashland at different times. We loved getting together to celebrate holidays, birthdays, and other occasions. All the women were great cooks!

In the summer we would have picnics in Lithia Park nearly every Sunday with several tables weighed down with food . . . Aunt Gertrude's hot-dog sandwiches, fried chicken, potato salads, fruit salads, my mom's baked beans, Aunt Marie's dill pickles and homemade grape juice, and lots and lots of cakes and pies and other delicious dishes! There were always lots of cousins to play with while the grownups sat in lawn chairs and visited. However, even with this large, close family I felt a loss in one area. Although I had a paternal grandfather and a maternal grandmother, I never had a full set of grandparents. My Grandfather Scriptor lived in Kansas and we lived "way out west" in Ashland. My Grandmother Beach was around part of the time when I was growing up but I felt left out when other kids talked about their grandmas and grandpas and the ways they spoiled them. I yearned for a "full set" of grandparents.

I only saw my grandfather a few times in my life. He came to Oregon to visit maybe two times and since I have no memories of this I must have been quite small. My family made only one trip to Kansas to see my grandfather and his wife; this was when I was 13 years old. It was a strange and strained visit made in the middle of a sultry, hot summer. Things got off to a bad start because the June bugs were out and at night they danced around us if we were outside and they batted against the screen door if we were inside. They made a frightening

racket. I was deathly afraid of any creatures with more than two legs so this had me in a frenzy most of the time. Tornado warnings and talk of going to the dark, dank cellar for shelter—full of six and eight legged creatures, I was sure—did nothing to improve the situation.

In addition, the farmhouse was hot, gloomy, and lacked bathroom facilities. Horror of horrors, I had to use the *outhouse*. Not only was it dark and full of flies, every time I parked myself down I got splinters in my rear end. Sitting in the small one-holer on a hot summer day was truly an overwhelming experience of suffocation and stench. Of course, as a thirteen year old I'm sure I was very melodramatic about all the "inconveniences" of a Kansas farm in the 1950s. I sulked and just wanted to be back in our home in Ashland where we had three bathrooms with three shiny white toilets that flushed!

To top things off, my Grandfather Scripter and his wife did not fit the typical kind, sweet Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus images of grandparents. My grandfather was a rather grumpy and distant old man. His teasing seemed mean-spirited to me and I was afraid of him. My step-grandmother was sharp tongued and I just tried to stay out of her way. As I look back, I'm sure my shyness and timid personality threw things out of proportion regarding my perceptions of Grandfather Scripter, my step-grandmother, and the Kansas visit.

I was somewhat close to my maternal Grandmother Beach. She lived with us for quite awhile on Scenic Drive before she moved to her own apartment and the two of us shared a bed. I know she loved me but she wasn't the type to cuddle or pamper a child or soothe a child's tears. She was a no nonsense, stoic German widow who was constantly on my case--though never in a mean-spirited way--for kicking her during the night (I did this in my sleep), for dawdling when doing my chores, or for reading or drawing or playing when there must be *some* work to be done.

One memory I have is of her teaching us kids--my brothers Sam (Morton) and Don, and me--a phrase in German that tickled us to no end. At the present I can't remember the German words but they sounded so foreign and funny they made us giggle. They meant "throw the cat over the tree". (Grandma hated cats!) We always begged her to "tell us again, tell us again!" then we'd whoop in laughter when she repeated the phrase. As I look back in time, I think Grandma Beach's German was a bit more theatrical each time she repeated those words.

Although it didn't come out too often, Grandma Beach had a sense of humor. When I think of her I remember an incident that that happened when I was first married. My husband, Rod, and I were visiting Ashland and Grandma was there at my folks'. Rod always loved to tease my relatives and it gave him *great* pleasure to tease Grandma Beach. I can't remember just what he was pulling her leg about, but I know he was really 'getting her goat'. Then my normally serious, stoic German grandmother could no longer control herself and she started

laughing. She laughed until tears streamed down her cheeks then she rolled up a newspaper and started whopping my husband on the head and the back. The two of them ran out the front door, Rod squealing and pretending to fend her off and Grandma red in the face and still snorting with laughter. She chased him down our front steps then down Scenic Drive all the way to Wimer Street! It was a marvelous side of her I hadn't seen before.

Having Grandma Beach around helped. However, I still yearned for a *complete set* of warm and affectionate grandparents, right there in Ashland, Oregon. Grandparents who would shower me with their attention and affection.

My Great-Uncle Hugh McKeever and my father, Eldon Scripter, ran the Marshall Wells hardware store on the Plaza. My Great-Aunt Marie McKeever worked there off and on as a clerk. (Aunt Marie was my father's aunt.) They lived on Morton Street during my childhood so we saw a lot of them. Their house was small but they had huge side yard and swing and for awhile, a wonderful collie name Laddie. Every once in awhile I was invited to lunch at their house--*all by myself!*

I loved going to their house. There was always a warm hug and a kiss on the forehead when I arrived. Then Aunt Marie always fixed my favorite meal--V-8 juice, all the potato chips I wanted to eat, store-bought cookies from her cookie jar (What a crazy kid—liking cookies from a bag more than my Mom's delicious homemade ones!), and homemade Sloppy Joes. I was a finicky eater with a small appetite but I could really "put it away" at Aunt Marie's. My mom was a great cook so I'm not sure why I liked Aunt Marie's simple meal so much. I think it had to do with being served food I normally didn't eat at home and knowing it was made expressly for me.

Many times, after eating our meal, both my aunt and uncle would listen while I played songs on their piano from a music book about Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy. They brought out this special music book when I came to visit. I certainly wasn't a child prodigy, but having them sit and listen motivated me to do my very best.

As I look back on the times I spent with my great aunt and great uncle I realize that I was truly loved and cherished by them. Although I wasn't conscious of this as a child, I know now that although I didn't have an 'official' grandmother and grandfather set I truly did have an authentic "grandma and grandpa *twosome*." Aunt Marie and Uncle Hugh were the 'Grandparents of my heart'.