

## **Hilda Massey – A Remembrance**

My mother, Hilda Caro Jackson, was born on September 20, 1918 on a farm near Whaleysville on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

Whaleysville is named after Captain Peter Whaley who, according to an on-line Whaley family history, “had varied and successful interests which included ownership in a general store, boarding house, hotel, blacksmith shop, saw, grist and carding mill, lumbering and coastal shipping and also in effect, the only banker of the area.”

According to my mother, the farm was one of three that composed the original Peter Whaley farm. She said the house was the original Whaley house and that it was reputed to be haunted when her parents bought it. The Captain died in 1860 but had sons Seth and Edward identified in records of the time as farmers in Whaleyville. One of them had 800 acres and that may have been the source of the three farms. The house didn't seem grand enough to have been the home of a man like the Captain.

Whatever the history, the house is gone. My Uncle Franklin who lived with his mother until she died bought a mobile home for the two of them and burned the old house down in the 1970's.

Although I knew my mother for 18 years until her death in 1968, it strikes me now how little I really know about her. She didn't talk much about herself. I spent many summers and weekends with my Grandmother on the farm and again, I know very little about her life either.

Hilda was the first of three children and was probably born at the farm. She had two younger brothers, Wilber and Franklin (Benjamin Franklin). It is possible that she was born, like me, at a doctor's laying-in hospital. I was born in Berlin, not at home, but not in a real hospital. Uncle Sam was delivered in Salisbury in a real Hospital. Mom said it was very hot in Salisbury that summer.

Her mother, Aleafy Caro Timmons and father, J. Benjamin Jackson (Ben's namesake) married later than typical for the age. Aleafy, born on Valentines's Day in 1887, was 31 when Hilda was born. Benjamin was six years older, 37 at the time. She said thought she would be a spinster but somehow that changed. In those times most people didn't wait until they reached 30 to start a family. She told a story of her beau cutting up a church social. I guess every one loves a clown. Other than that I know nothing of their courtship or life together.

Aleafy was a Timmons and grew up on a farm near Timmonstown. When I was growing up Timmonstown was just a country store at a crossroads. One of my best friends was Bob Timmons but I don't know how we were related other than we were distant cousins.

Whaleysville was a bit larger than Timmonstown. I remember it having a small elementary school, a country store and a few houses. The farm was actually few miles

from the town and was at the end of a dirt road (now Hall Road) from what was then US 50. It was a two-lane road that went through Salisbury, Parsonsburg, Pittsville, Willards, Saint Martin, Berlin, and on to Ocean City. In the late 50's they built the new Route 50 Highway to carry the Ocean City traffic. It skips all the small towns and goes over one of the farm's best fields.

My grandfather died when I was 5. He got sick, went to the hospital and died. It happened in 1950 and he was 69. My father was still alive. I remember my grandfather as white haired, balding and somewhat thin. I don't know what he died of and know little of his life. Mom said that he had been a Raleigh salesman for a time. Raleigh's Salve is the only remaining Raleigh product I know of. I think he was basically a peddler who went from farm to farm. The trade has disappeared along with the Fuller Brush man.

My grandmother was plump for most of the time I knew her. A few years before she died, she got sick and became quite thin. She had blue eyes and her hair was gray from the time I knew her. When I was young, she kept her hair long and in a braid that she wrapped into a bun. Later she had a neighbor who would come over to cut and blue her hair. She rarely left the farm. Mom would buy her nice things but she never wore them.

The house was shingled, had three bedrooms upstairs, large kitchen, parlor, dining room and a back porch. There were two ruined tenant houses in the fields. In the Whaley days there were probably slaves. There was a piano in the parlor and my grandmother could play. I heard her play only once. The house didn't have a bathroom. There was shower in the 'Pump House' and an outhouse with Sears and Roebuck catalogs and a basket of corncocks.

My mother was born in 1918 two months before the end of World War I. The Great Depression began eleven years later with the October 1929 stock market crash. These were not prosperous times. My grandmother said they bought the farm with a mortgage and worried about the debt until they finally paid it off. I think she said they paid \$500 for the farm. My grandfather started a milk route and the extra income helped pay it off. With no debt and the milk route they reached a certain comfort level.

The milk route was a trucking service. Farmers keeping cows need to deliver the milk to a processor daily before it spoils. My grandfather did the trucking every evening and my uncle Franklin continued it. I used to ride with Franklin around the back roads picking up 2 to 8 five-gallon cans of raw milk at each stop. We would end in Snow Hill and wait with other trucks for our turn to unload. The cans would go on rollers in one door and come out another empty. We would load up the empties and retrace the route from farm to farm. Each farm would have a truck-high platform along the road for the milk cans. Like farming, it was a 7-day a week job with no vacations.

When I was older I would ride in the back of the truck and help load and unload the cans. By then the route was done in the morning and Franklin was living in town during his brief marriage. I would ride my bike uptown and meet him with our dog Bingo (originally named Bimbo by Mom). The dog rode in the cab and I rode in the back.

When we returned he would pay me 50 cents and Aunt Bobby would cook us a big breakfast of eggs, toast and scrapple. In the evenings I had my newspaper route that paid me another \$11 per week.

So my mother grew up on a family farm in the 1920's and 30's with two younger brothers. She had her own room and the boys had theirs. When I stayed with my grandmother I stay in my mothers room. It had a steel double bed painted white and a small closet. It was a corner room and there were two windows, one on each wall. The window glass was very old and wavy. I've heard that over time the glass gets thinner at the top and thicker at the bottom.

The house was heated with a coal stove in the dining room and a wood stove in the kitchen. The upstairs was unheated. My grandmother slept in a dark wood bed with a feather mattress. When I was little I would sleep with her in the winter to stay warm. When I was older sleeping in my mother's room I would be under quilts so heavy I was almost unable to move.

They were prosperous enough that all of the kids went to high school. This was progress. Aleafy had gone to a one-room schoolhouse where they taught her to read, write and do arithmetic. They forced her to write right-handed even though she was left-handed like me. One of her fellow students was Frank Purdue's father who started the chicken empire. Although Aleafy lived for 94 years she said she was a sickly child. Her sister lived to be 99.

My mother was a good student and loved to read. She said she had a friend she would visit and they would just read together. She attended elementary school in Whaleysville and went to Buckingham High School in Berlin 5 miles away. Buckingham was in the form of an H. One wing was the elementary school for Berlin and surrounding area and the other wing was the high school. The connector was the Gym/Auditorium.

I know the school well. I went to elementary school at Buckingham when I was six. There was no Kindergarten then, although four years later Sam went to half-day Kindergarten. Shortly after I started elementary school they built a consolidated high school, Stephen Decatur, on US 50 between Ocean City and Berlin. Buckingham became an Elementary school. Grades 4, 5, and 6 at Buckingham were moved to the high school side of Buckingham and grades 1-3 expanded to fill the 6 rooms that originally contained grades 1-6.

In the hall outside of the Gym on the high school side was a bronze plaque listing the Honor Society members for her year. I remember seeing her name on it. Buckingham has since been demolished and removed. I don't know where the plaque is now.

Mom never spoke of her school days or childhood. Although they lived less than 20 miles from the city of Salisbury, she said she was a teen before she saw it. She said they had a Model-T Ford and they all got in one day and went to Salisbury. She didn't say why or what her impression was.

In High School she took the Business Curriculum and learned to type, take shorthand and keep books. When she graduated she took a job at Calvin B. Taylor Bank in Berlin. This would be about 3 years before the start of WWII in 1939. She lived in town with relatives on Powellton Avenue. Next door, was my future father Charlie Massey, who was staying with his sister Mary and Milton Hastings her husband. Charlie was divorced and 15 years older than Hilda. His ex-wife and daughter, Shirley, were living Florida. He was in the Coast Guard and away most of his time living in Light Houses and Light Ships. Milton, my future uncle, had been his best friend growing up on farms on and near the Synepuxent Bay. Charlie was a high school graduate and Uncle Mit received seven years of education in a one-room schoolhouse. Aunt Mary actually went on to college at Towson State Teachers but said she didn't like it and quit.

Somehow my father and mother met, courted and married. I think she was 21. They rented a two-bedroom house on Williams Street near the junction with Route 346 (Old Route 50). It was heated with a coal stove and looks the same now as it did then. It is still occupied. At some point, his daughter Shirley left her mother in Florida and lived with them while she was in high school. Shirley graduated in 1945. There was 10 years difference between the wife and the daughter. Shirley married Skip, (Horace junior), Quillen after high school and quickly had a child, Davis who is only two years younger than I.

They had their first child, Richard Lynn Massey October 8, 1942 when she was 24. The United States was at war. Pearl harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941 and American garrisons in the Pacific fell to the Japanese in the spring of 1942. The US was entering the war in Europe.

I was born June 1945 a month after victory was achieved in Europe. Richard died nine months later on March 21, 1946. Sam was born four years after me on June 11, 1949. Mother's father died in 1950 and my father died January 7 1951. Child, father and husband, three deaths in 5 years: there was a lot of pain.

I don't remember Richard but I do remember sharing a room with Sam when he was a baby. I don't remember the pregnancy. I do remember my father but not much. He commuted to his post at Lewis Delaware and lived on boats. He would be home on a 3-day pass and then gone for days.

Mom didn't say anything about the courtship or what it was like losing a child who was probably ill for months, or what life was like before me. She mentioned rationing during WWII but not much else about those years. She had two brothers overseas in the war and never mentioned what it was like. Franklin gave her a jewelry chest from his tour with the Marines in the Pacific but there was no story to go with it.

What I know about her was from living with her. And most of that time she was a single widow with two small children and not much income.

What was she like? My uncle Franklin used to say that she came first and got all the looks and brains. In her room at the farm was her high school graduation picture. She had a nice face, fair complexion, blue eyes, and described herself as a strawberry blond. She was medium height and kept a trim figure. She said her legs were her best feature. She would work at tanning them. She wore a padded bra to augment nature and always had to have new dresses re-hemmed because butt wasn't full enough to keep the dress from sagging in the rear. When she went to work she always looked good. She wore skirts and sweaters, earrings and necklace and set her hair before she went to bed at night.

She had black coffee, toast and bacon for breakfast every morning. She usually fixed us eggs or cereal for breakfast. I never saw her eat an egg. On the Eastern Shore you can't cook without a fry pan. For dinner we had fried chicken, fried pork chops, hamburger or fried steak. Occasionally we had meatloaf or spaghetti. For company or Sunday dinner you would roast or stew a chicken.

In an age when smoking was common, she didn't smoke and didn't approve of smoking. She also didn't drink because she didn't like the feeling but she wasn't against it. She didn't learn to drive until after I was born. My father gave her a few lessons and then a neighbor (Bonnie Baker's mother) rode with her for practice. I remember riding along. I think it was a Chevy.

When my father was home we would sometimes take a Sunday drive. I don't know what else they enjoyed together. I don't remember them eating in restaurants or going out. At Christmas Uncle Mit and Aunt Mary would come over and my father and Mit would make eggnog and get drunk. I remember my uncles getting together and sitting on the porch drinking beer and smoking cigarettes. My father smoked Lucky Strikes. Uncle Mit smoked Chesterfields. Camels were also popular. Sometimes I would get a sip of beer. I couldn't wait until I was old enough to smoke.

When I was small she had no car. We walked a lot. There was a small grocery down the road where US 113 now crosses Route 346 and we would walk to it or she would have groceries delivered. She would buy me a box of Animal Crackers when we went to the store.

If she needed some thing from town we would walk and it was a mile or more. There was a Laundromat a few doors down and I would go with her to do laundry. I hated going because there was a man there who teased me and I was very shy.

She didn't go back to work until Sam was in school. She read a lot and kept house and visited friends and neighbors and was an active member of the Ladies Auxiliary of the American Legion. When I was small she would read to me. I still remember most of the Nursery Rhymes. I would make her read the Sunday Comics to me. She wasn't especially interested in cooking or gardening. She could crochet and knit and sew. I remember her doing those things. She would crochet baby booties with a ribbon tie for pregnant friends. She had a gadget for weaving squares that could be joined into a quilted

blanket. She had an electric Singer sewing machine and would curse when she sewed. It must have been a very lonely life when she wasn't working.

She was somewhat inattentive as a mother. The world was recovering from War, the Korean War was brewing and the Cold War became a reality. Parenting was not yet a competitive skill and the guidebook of the age, Dr. Spock's Baby Book, was mostly concerned with feeding babies and nursing ill. If you kept them fed and watered babies would grow up just fine kind of like livestock. I was very nearsighted for years before she noticed and took me to get glasses.

She wasn't the kind of person who would get on the floor and play with children. With me she was a pretty crisp disciplinarian. I remember being spanked often and sometimes hard. Once she locked me in an outhouse because I was crying so loud. She was gentler with Sam. She wasn't physically affectionate. I don't remember hugs or words of love. In this she was like her mother, however my grandmother was not a disciplinarian. I was never spanked or remember a harsh word while in her care.

I remember my father as being more of a kids kind of guy. Both he and my grandmother Massey would get on the floor to play with me. I've heard him described as being fun loving. He was a Mason, a Tall Cedar. Mom said they were the playboys of the Masons.

He had four children so I think he liked children. When he was home he and I would walk over to Aydelotte's gas station on the intersection of Williams and RT 346 and he would buy us a Coca Cola and chat with Norman while he worked on cars. When I was older I would ride my bike down and hang around the station and also watch him work on cars.

She wasn't religious. She tried for a while to go to church and send us to Sunday school but it didn't last. She really liked to sleep late on Sunday and not get dressed all day. My uncle Mit would tease her and say it was good that she had children otherwise she would lie in bed all day and starve to death. If we needed milk on Sunday, she would put on a robe and drive me up to Menzak's, the only store open on Sunday. She would wait in the car while I ran in to get the milk.

Like her mother, she was fair-minded and not prejudiced. I never heard either say anything hurtful about blacks. And this was a time when blacks went to separate schools, there were 'colored' lodgings along the highways and there were 'colored' and 'white' bathrooms in the city hall. The stores would not hire a black as a sales clerk and the only black working at the Sinclair gas station was Jo-Jo who washed cars.

Also like her mother she was very plain spoken and matter of fact. There was no drama, flattery or exaggeration in what was said. If it was ugly, it might be 'as ugly as a mud fence' but there was no hedging of words. Like many on the Eastern Shore she had no artifice or pretense.

She enjoyed the company of women and had married girl friends. When I was older she had Canasta parties and I would hand out sodas and beer. She was active in the Ladies Auxiliary and served as President at least once. I remember her working the phone getting people organized for some event.

She visited her mother often on the farm. I don't remember any animosity between them. She didn't seem close to her brothers but Franklin lived with his mother and he was good to me. I followed him like a puppy when I stayed with my grandmother. Wilbur was career Air force and a pilot. He joined the Army Air Force out of high school, was overseas for most of his career and rarely visited. Although he wrote regularly to his mother I don't recall much correspondence between him and my mother. We did visit him and his wife Norma once when he was posted at Richmond.

My father died on January 7, 1951 at the age of 48. He disappeared off a Light Ship in the Delaware Bay. I remember getting up that morning to my mother sobbing in the dining room surrounded by relatives. At five and a half, I really didn't understand but I noticed that he stopped coming home. When I was older I imagined that he was still away and would surprise us by coming home. My mother was a wreck for weeks. She would absent-mindedly pour two cups of coffee and then just sob at the table.

At that time they had a three-bedroom house being built at 330 Williams Street. I remember my father working alongside the builders (Taylor Brothers) while it was going up. It was finished that spring and we moved in May or June. It looks the same now except that a garage has been added. The two trees in front were planted by my father are mature now. We had a calico cat named Matilda and she kept returning to the old house but she eventually adjusted. We had a number of dogs and cats over the years. That fall I started school. The first Christmas morning there she had a major sobbing attack. After that she rarely mentioned my father.

My father left a \$10,000 insurance policy. It was used to pay off the mortgage and the remainder paid for an annuity which paid my mother \$30.88 a month. I suppose she also got a widows pension from the government. We had what we needed but there were no frills. When she took us to the beach she packed lunch. We didn't buy lunch on the boardwalk or give me nickels to play the amusements. She would buy donuts at the pastry shop to take home. She liked popcorn and would sometimes take home a box.

She managed her money carefully. The house was kept in good repair. She replaced the floor furnace with hot water baseboard heat. She bought awnings for the windows. She bought a clothes-dryer. We had a '53 Chevy Bel-Aire, then a '58 Ford Fairlane and then a '62 Nash-Rambler Classic. When the furniture looked shoddy she could afford to replace it. She paid cash for every thing. Occasionally I would stop after school and buy galoshes or clothes. I would just say 'charge it to my mom' and they would send her a statement, which she would promptly pay. It was a small town and I didn't have to say who my mom was, they knew.

When Sam started school she took an office job at the racetrack, Ocean Downs. I think the pay was minimum wage, \$1 per hour. Eventually she was paid \$60 a week and more during the racing season because she stayed until midnight to tally the take. I don't remember her taking vacations. We didn't take trips. A big thrill was to go to the Delaware State Fair at Harrington where they had a stage show and fireworks.

With the extra money she enjoyed a visit to the Beauty Parlor each week and had a black lady do the heavy cleaning bi-weekly for \$8 a day. Her name was Dolly and she lived on Flower Street, which was the black section of town. I would drive Dolly home after school. Many of the homes on Flower Street were small and unkempt. It was close to Stephen Decatur High School but the blacks were bussed to their school near Cambridge.

When I was small the town had a Baseball Team, the Berlin Bombers. Many towns had teams and they would play each other on weekends. My Uncle Mit was a big baseball fan and was the Manager of the Bombers. Mom would go to some of the home games and sometimes to the away games in Easton or Crisfield.

I remember going to the Fireman's picnics, crabbing with other families, and an overnight stay in a cabin on Assateague with the Conoly's. She was a Cub Scout Den Mother and went to PTA meetings, and came to listen to me play in the school band and did what she could to raise me right. I was in the Boy Scouts, Explorer Scouts and Demolay. I was terrible student and this disappointed her greatly.

In my senior year of high school I had to think about my future. There wasn't much to do in Berlin. I read a book by Vance Packard who pointed out that the land of opportunity had limits if you didn't have an education. So I applied to the University of Maryland. At the time they would take any Maryland HS grad. If you did poorly on the SATs you would be conditionally admitted and had to take English I and Government and Politics I in summer school at College Park. I did well on the SATs and was fully admitted despite the poor grades.

Mom found that I was eligible for a \$500 per year State War Orphans Scholarship and that was enough to pay for books and tuition.

That spring Mom saw the town doctor, Dr. Robbins, and then a specialist in Salisbury. One spring day she had me drive her to her appointment in Salisbury. I waited in the car while she went in. After a while the doctor came out and sat in the car with me. He explained that she had a cancer and might die. I don't think I believed him.

I graduated in June and Mom started going to Baltimore for Radiation treatments. She had cervical cancer and I think that few survived then. I would drive her to Salisbury on Sunday and she would take the bus to Baltimore and stay in a hotel. Later in the week I would pick her up. I was working in Ocean City and Sam stayed with my grandmother.

In September my Uncle Mit drove me to College Park and I started school, a bumpkin in the big city. With no study skills I had to work harder than most to keep up, but I didn't

do badly. John Kennedy was shot that fall on a Friday afternoon. And I was listening to live radio coverage in Dallas when Oswald was killed.

I went home for Thanksgiving and don't remember much about it. I went home for Christmas and she said that she had been in the hospital. She tired easily and stayed in bed much of the time. She had me take the car back to school and I dropped her off at the hospital on the way.

I had a term paper to write and final exams. The morning I finished my Aunt Mary called and said I should come home. I drove fast and stopped at the hospital to see how she was. The nurse said that she had died the night before, January 10, 1964. She was 45. So I went to Aunt Mary and Uncle Mit's house. Mom had made a Will when she found out how ill she was. Aunt Mary and Mit were made our Guardians and Executors of the Estate.

We went to the funeral home the next day and picked out a coffin and a burial gown. She already had a plot at Evergreen Cemetery. I don't remember picking out a headstone but we must have done it then also. The Memorial service was at the Methodist Church on Main Street that we had spent so little time in.

She didn't have health insurance but the racetrack generously paid the bills. The house sold at auction for about \$10,000 and Sam and I split the money.

She rests with her mother, father, child and extended family in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Berlin. It has been almost 40 years but her memory lives in me.

Nick Massey  
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