

Shirley Huffer Eulogy

Shirley Clevenger Huffer: born May 28, 1925 in Toledo OH, died March 3, 2008 in Kettering OH. Those are the cut and dried facts for a pretty remarkable woman who led a full – and fulfilling -- life. As her nephew Paul said, when I spoke with him Monday evening, the last of Shirley's generation of Clevengers has now passed away.

Mom would be thrilled to see so many of her family and friends gathered together; embarrassed maybe by all the attention, but thrilled. Long-time friends from nearby, family from near and far, literally from the 4 corners of this country: Portland OR to Portland ME, California to Florida.

If she had been born in another era, Mom could well have been an outstanding business executive or military leader. Family vacations were like a military campaign: departures & arrivals precisely on time, picnic lunches packed (no restaurants – too expensive), individual travel packs prepared for each child, the supply of Readers Digest to read out loud to Dad as he drove, empty glass jars for us boys (Katherine never had to suffer that indignity!) to avoid unplanned stops.

Mom would never describe herself this way, but she was a trooper. In an era when it was very unusual for a young lady to go to any college or university, Mom traveled far from home to attend and graduate from Duke University in 1947. Mom remained active in the local Kappa Alpha Theta association to the very end.

Two years after her graduation, Mom & Dad got married. Trooper that she was, Mom supported her new husband as he completed his surgical residency, at a time when medical residents were expected to work pretty much 24/7 for nothing more than cafeteria meals (which Dad would sneak out to Mom whenever possible). Mom worked, she kept them fed and housed on her meager salary, though in later better years they could hardly stand the sight of peanut butter or tuna salad. An aversion which I think most of my siblings inherited. Mom turned to homemaking full-time when her “little surprise” came along.

Mom showed true strength and courage during and after the devastating house gas explosion of 1952: making sure that Bruce & I were safely rescued, and fighting for her life & that of her youngest during the weeks that they were hospitalized. Mom was so grateful to her sister Flo and their family for taking us in and helping us get back on our feet, but she also pushed to make sure that, as soon as she was able, she could care for her family in our own place in Packanack Lake.

Flash forward 30 years to when Dad died, unexpectedly and in the prime of his life. Mom and Dad had celebrated their 35th anniversary just a few months earlier, and had just begun to enjoy life without kids around and to at least think about the day when Dad might retire and they could travel to their heart's content. I'm sure that, inside, Mom was devastated, but as Katherine describes it, she refused to feel sorry for herself. Mom made sure that all the arrangements were completed, she made sure that her family was together (as we are again today). And once that was over, she moved forward with her life. She remained active with her friends and

organizations, traveling the world with Mary Lou and her dear friend Katie, visiting with family at home and wherever they might be. But, despite all her friends and family, the past 20+ years must have been lonely without Dad.

Mom was frugal – OK, cheap. Heaven forbid that one of us should waste 75 cent gas on an unnecessary trip to the store. Or that we should expect more than a single small glass of orange juice – that was such an extravagance! Brian recalls the summer he & Bruce took their big road trip before Bruce was to start school in CT, all the way to the west coast and back, and then the 2 of them driving a car & a truck to CT to get Bruce moved in. After driving thousands of miles Brian just wanted to get home, as quickly as possible. Mom, however, could see no good reason to waste the \$75 for the flight from CT to Dayton when there was a perfectly good Grayhound bus available for ½ the cost.

On the other hand, Katherine recalls a trip Mom made to visit her & Dan in San Francisco. Kath figures that Mom used up weeks of their rationed water (it was a severe drought in CA) during her stay; she just loved her baths! I guess so long as she wasn't paying the bills ... It was later in this same California trip that Mom was in San Jose with Bruce & Shannon & the kids. Same drought, different story.

Mom always wanted to help out in the kitchen, Bruce decided to put her to work washing mushrooms. She spent 20 minutes with the water running, washing each individual mushroom. Shannon and the kids found great amusement in watching Bruce, who was beside himself anticipating the water charges he was sure to endure. He even tried to turn the water off a couple of times, but Mom turned it right back on. Mom won, and they had the cleanest mushrooms ever.

In Mom's defense, she was a product of her upbringing. She grew up in a family that went through the Great Depression and the shortages and rationing of World War II.

Frugal, yes, but Mom was generous, especially with her time: with her children, as we were growing up, and with various clubs & organizations once we had left home: the Women's Club, Cox Arboretum, and many more. She also was a true clothing traditionalist; she never EVER donned a pair of blue jeans, except once under duress during a family trip to a dude ranch in Colorado in the 1960s. We will always recall with fondness Mom's signature attire for family travel -- pleated plaid skirt, neatly pressed blouse with a cardinal on each collar, and a navy blazer.

Mom had strong opinions (which she freely shared with others); some might describe her as stubborn? Family and friends might not always agree with her opinions and decisions, but she stuck to them and could rarely be budged. Brian recalls Mom's decision some years ago to get that racy red Firebird (after grudgingly agreeing that getting in & out of something like his small Miata was a bit tough). No shopping for features – the car she wanted was right on the showroom floor. No haggling for price – DeeDee snuck off and negotiated the deal with the salesman. No test drive – she asked Brian to do that for her. And of course Brian had to drive the car home for her; she was far too nervous to do that herself.

Or Katherine's recollection of a Mom-and-daughter trip to Aspen for the music festival. At some point Kath just HAD to get away for a solitary bike ride, but Mom insisted that she HAD to come along. With her quick-thinking lawyer's mind, Katherine pulled aside the young guy running the rental shop and asked him to tell Mom that she would have to pass a riding test before they could rent a bike to her. What Katherine forgot in her instructions was that he needed to make sure Mom flunked the test. Nope, Mom managed to pass the test with flying colors, and off they went, at a sedate and stately pace!

Mom grew up with a father, Russell Clevenger, who also had strong opinions. On a visit to our house once, Mom asked Grandpa if he would take his 2 grandsons to see a movie; he readily agreed. Until he found out the movie was PT109, about "that young Democrat". But change is possible: Katherine recalls a conversation with Mom shortly after the 2004 Presidential election in which Mom, a life-long Republican, admitted to voting for the very first time for a Democrat, John Kerry. Fortunately, selective memory came to her rescue: a year later, she (like much of the country, I guess) couldn't even remember who John Kerry was when she spotted his name on a bumper sticker.

Indeed, Mom knew what she wanted and when she wanted it up to the very end. Last Sunday, at the hospital, with the 4 of us kids there, Mom several times asked a question which we didn't initially understand: "Is tomorrow the big day?" "Is tomorrow the big day?" And, it turns out that Monday was the big day, for her, the day she could rejoin Dad and her sisters and her Mother and Father.

How else would we describe Mom? She was a neatnick; just look at her obsessive-compulsive children. Bruce, for example, has to wake up at 6:12 every morning because that is his birthday. If he needs to wake earlier for surgery it has to be in a multiple of 12, like 5:48 etc. Dan and DeeDee have had to learn to live with spouses for whom "a place for everything, and everything in it's place" is not just a cliché, it's a way of life.

Mom was a chocaholic – just ask Katie, or the nurses at Kettering Hospital who kept her supplied with chocolate pudding right to the very end. I guess that's how I ended up marrying a chocaholic myself.

Above all, Mom was about family and friends. Mom raised 4 children, 3 "active" boys and her long-awaited little girl; 1 of us born a bit earlier in life than expected, another a bit later in life than expected. Yes, Bruce, Brian, Katherine and I were lucky enough to have 2 loving parents who were always there for us, but Mom was the face and voice of our home. There was a traditional (old-fashioned?) 1950's marriage. But heck, Mom was a devotee of Dr. Spock, and she was and is fact still is a card-carrying member of Progressive Mothers (something Katherine & her little friends used to giggle about behind closed doors). The fact that all 4 of us are here and have remained close is a testament to Mom's success as a parent.

Which is why she would be so pleased to see all of you here today. Mom may not have been real demonstrative: our family members were not big huggers or kissers. I'm sure they did, but I cannot recall seeing Mom and Dad hug or kiss or hold hands, at least in public. But Mom loved

her children, her grandchildren, and her great-grandson. And Mom enjoyed and appreciated her many friends, from church, from bridge, and from elsewhere

Yes, in the past few years, as her health began to decline, Mom did become a bit more difficult. But I know that despite what may have been said or done, especially for those of you who would see her on a regular basis, Mom's love and appreciation for you was still there. Just harder for her to express.

Mom, we've loved you, argued with you, and laughed with you. We're saddened that you will no longer be with us, but so glad that you have gone to a better place to be with Dad and all of your family. We will miss you, Mom, but you will always be in our hearts and minds.