

Chapter 10: Hurricane of '38

We lived at 51 Ash Street from the time I was nine years old until I was twelve years old. Our house was a large six family house with a flat roof. We were on the third floor on the right side of the house, the Greenwoods were on the second floor, and the Duchesneaus were on the bottom floor. On the left side of the house, one apartment was empty on the third floor where the Vertefeuelles, Robert, Norman, Germaine, and Babe lived. Brettschneiders were on the second floor, and the Dazy's were on the first floor (three generations of Dazy family, Jimmy and Michael Dazy are the fifth generation, and Brittany Dazy is the sixth generation (Shirley Shirelle's children).

When living at our house on 51 Ash Street, a hurricane came, and we became homeless again. In 1938, there were no government weather ships, hurricane tracking aircraft, or satellites. Previously, airlines had been grounded because of bad weather. Ships at sea were moved out of the storm area. The last tropical hurricane on the northeast coast was on September 23, 1815. It took one hundred twenty-three years, almost to the day, for a hurricane to hit us again. The hurricane of September 21, 1938 was really a bad one.

It was a tropical hurricane, called the New England Express that slammed into New England on Wednesday, September 21, 1938. Our town of Willimantic was directly in its path. The hurricane was first noticed at Bilma Oasis in the Sahara Desert in Northwest Africa on September 4, 1938, and it passed into the Atlantic Ocean near Cape Verde Islands on September 7, 1938. Then, the hurricane passed by Puerto Rico at 20 miles per hour, and ended up taking the roof off of our house in New England at 51 Ash Street, Willimantic, Connecticut.

Our hurricane was very dangerous because it came for several thousand miles over the Atlantic Ocean. The name hurricane comes from the Caribbean Indian storm god Huracan. A

hurricane forms around a low pressure which draws a warm, moist air from the ocean. As the process builds up, cooler air flowing in from all sides spirals in a counter-clockwise direction. So, the storm takes the shape of a doughnut with a calm hole in the center - the eye of the storm. It becomes a hurricane when the winds are 75 miles per hour. Some of our winds reached 120 miles per hour.

We were in our home when the roof blew off our, but thankfully no one was hurt. It was just my two sisters and I, because my mother went to work as usual, and my father was no longer with us. We had been home from School since the Wednesday before, September 14, because of all the flooding. Luckily, there was no school at the time of the hurricane, because the storm struck Wednesday, September 21st, just after 3:00 P.M. when school was getting out. If the storm did strike at school, children might have gotten hurt.

The Coast Guard rescued entire families in boats just six hours before the storm struck, because of all the flooding. Willimantic people were not ready for a hurricane, because they were battling a flood. The rains started with showers on September 14th, off and on, until September 17th, and then the rains came in torrents for four days. Dams were in big trouble, and the first dam to let go was the Stafford Dam. This sent a great force of water into the Willimantic River, and overflowed the city of Willimantic.

When the Natchaug River, coming from Mansfield, and the Willimantic River, joined with the Shetucket River at the far end of Recreation Park, they overflowed their banks carrying away roads and bridges. Horseshoe Bridge in Down Sodom was one bridge carried away. Over this bridge was the way from Windham Center. This bridge plus the Jillson Bridge, and Bridge Street Bridge, isolated Willimantic from the rest of the world for forty-eight hours. Willimantic was the

only train route between Hartford, New Haven, Providence, and Boston and there no passenger service for three weeks. There was also no mail service.

All of lower Main Street, Route 14, Willowbrook Street, Cardinal's Square, Mayo Street, LaFayette Street, Adelbert Street and Lower Ash Street were flooded. A gas station on Willowbrook Street was damaged. Mayo Street and LaFayette Street were in a gully, and right next to the river, so these people (at least sixteen families) had to be rescued by boat. We, on the other hand, were still at home in our third floor apartment when the storm hit and our roof blew off. We were told to evacuate and walk up Chapman Street to the Elms Hotel on Main Street. The flood had stopped at Brook Street, so from there on, Main Street wasn't flooded and our house on Ash Street was one block away from Brook Street, so we walked up Chapman Street, crossed over Ives Street, and walked up to the Elms on Main Street. Fortunately, we were in the eye, the calm part of the storm, so we weren't afraid. I do not know why we were still in our home when the roof blew off, or why we were not evacuated earlier. We didn't have a telephone, and my mother was worried sick before she was told that we were safe at the Elms Hotel where she later found us. She was working at the Maverick Laundry at 1150 Main Street, which was a long way from our house, and she had to hurry home in order to find out that we were okay.

After we had arrived at the hotel and were in the kitchen eating, we could hear all the noises outdoors. We heard the cracking of trees, the winds, and the rain, but we could not see anything because the windows were high up. We were fortunate that we got to the hotel unharmed. My family was still in the hotel on September 29th for my older sister's sixteenth birthday. For her birthday present, I bought her a small pad of multicolored pages, and put a cardboard cover on it that said "Autograph Book." She had all the people at the hotel sign it.

Outside, the Natchaug Bridge was still passable and cars and people were scurrying over it. The Natchaug Bridge was on Route 6, and was a solid concrete bridge which had replaced the iron bridge within the past three years. We used to cross over the iron bridge to go swimming when we lived in that apartment for three years. Our neighborhood river was the Natchaug River, which was a lovely slow moving river, not very wide, and not very deep in places. We had several other swimming places: Gil Flynn's, the Island, the Baby Hole, the Trussel and Rabitaille's. We were very fortunate at our end of town to have such a sturdy bridge that wasn't destroyed by the storm.

At the other end of town, the water level was five feet deep at Bridge Street Crossing, and the people living on Pleasant Street and thereabouts were cut off from the rest of the city. The two bridges, Jillson and Bridge Street, which separated rivers, were out of commission.

The storm lasted two hours and the winds blew the roofs off many homes and businesses. Many windows were broken, and trees were knocked down. These fallen trees did damage to wires, buildings, and cars. Many trees at Park Springs and the Elks Fair Ground were downed. Area farms were hit badly and many animals were killed.

The roof blew off the New England Pants Factory on Ash Street hill, just up the street from our house. One man who went outside to go home was killed. The Roselyn Mfg. Company on Milk Street lost its roof, and the owners were lucky because they had hurricane insurance. Part of the Willimantic Town Hall roof fell off and damaged a car, and two of our churches, St. Joseph's Church on Jackson Street, and the Congregational Church on Valley Street, lost their steeples. These are only a fraction of the damages done to the people and buildings of Willimantic.

It was estimated that Willimantic damages were nearly a million dollars. The American Thread Company was the biggest loser. Besides the mills being shut down and losing revenue, they had a lot of damage because they were right on the Willimantic river. They were so upset by the damage done to Recreation Park, which had turned into a lake, that they deeded the park to the town. The park was then called the Old Fair Grounds, where the American Thread Company had many festivities including sulky races, where the famous horse Donny Brook won three races in a row. The American Thread company, who shut down for nearly a week, the Red Cross, and the Public Works Administration supplied cots, blankets, clothing, and food for the one hundred and thirty people who were homeless and staying at the Elms Hotel, a hotel which the American Thread had built years ago for their workers.

When the dam at the Mansfield Pumping Station let go, it left Willimantic with a limited supply of water, and practically crippled the town for fire protection. The fire engine pumper then gave water to the people for seventy-six hours. There was no electricity or gas for three days. The Connecticut Light and Power Company had a field kitchen where one hundred seventy-five of their workers were fed for three days by company women, cooking with fuel supplied by an improvised gas line. Many Willimantic people helped the CL & P by chopping down trees. More than one thousand trees were down, and most of them across roads. Getting from one place to another was almost impossible.

There was so much destruction in Willimantic that the State of Connecticut sent five hundred WPA (President Roosevelt workers program) workers to help clean up, and five hundred railroad workers were sent to repair the roadways. We also had CCC (Civilian Conservation Corp) workers who came to help clean up the damages. We knew some of the

CCC boys by name because they brought their laundry for years to the Willimantic Wet Wash, where my mother worked after she left the Maverick Laundry.

The hurricane should have gone out over the ocean from Cape Hatteras (as some people predicted), but the eye of the hurricane fell into a low pressure channel at the Cape and went up the ocean, off the coasts of Delaware and New Jersey, then up to Long Island and over to New England.

Even though many people in Willimantic were hurt and had to go to the hospital, we were lucky there was only one death (and this man had only been in our town for a week working at the factory). Our destruction, mostly from the winds, was not as bad as some other towns, especially at the coast of Connecticut. Those on the coast also suffered many deaths from tidal waves at the shoreline. In Connecticut, eighty-five people died due to the storm.

The total deaths in all the New England states was six hundred and eighty-two people in all. Seven hundred people were injured. Even if people were warned about the storm ahead of time, I do not see what anyone could have done about it. In a way, we were lucky that we were battling the flood, because people, including children, were already not going about their usual day-to-day activities. If the flood didn't happen and people went about their everyday activities, they might have been caught unaware by the heavy winds.

When we checked our apartment after the hurricane, we found that someone went in our house and stole my father's picture of when he was in the Navy. He was seventeen years old and handsome. They took the picture and left the frame. I would have liked to have that picture. Incidentally, my mother never tried to turn us against my father. Even though after seven years, a person is presumed dead when missing, my mother never took up with another man and always

wore her wedding ring. That shows what a valiant lady she was. She kept her vows even if he didn't.

My father disappeared in 1935, before Social Security. When I checked with Social Security, he was still alive at age eighty five. Later, I checked with them when he would have been one hundred years old (people in his family lived to be old), and I wasn't given a straight answer.

Chapter 11: Chapman Street

After the hurricane, our next apartment was on Chapman Street, where all the Polish people lived. My family and I made lots of new lifelong friends there. This apartment did not even have a bathroom, so we had to go across the street to an “outhouse.” My poor mother, she could survive anything, even a hurricane.

We were welcomed in the homes of the Polish people who lived in the five family house. There were the Paciks and the Wrzesiens (cousins) in the house, and we even got to call their father ‘tata. Polish people in America have their Christmas dinner on Christmas Eve (called Wigilia which means ‘vigil’). Their Christmas carols are called Kolendy, and Christmas Day is Boze Narodzenie. The Polish people have a prayer corner in their kitchen, and at Easter time the Polish Priest comes to the house and blesses the food, including babka bread.

I have a prayer corner in my house with a very large picture of the “Lady of Guadalupe” from Mexico, who I have always known. In my prayer corner, I have snapshots of people I pray for stuck all around the frame and on the wall.

At the carnival one year, I won a nice gold (not real) bracelet of ‘Our Lady of Guadalupe’ and I gave it to my step-daughter, Terry, because she was such a nice Christian girl who read the Bible and joined the Catholic Religion all by herself.

The Polish kids from Chapman Street used to walk the tracks, cross over the tussle, and go down the steps on the other side of the river to go swimming. It seemed like each group had their own swimming place. Ours was at Rabbitilles, near the Willimantic Wet Wash where my mother worked. The Polish kids had the Baby Hole, the Rock, and the Island. Some others had Gil Flynn’s.

One day, I went swimming at Gil Flynn's and got hurt. There was a high mound for a diving place and instead of me diving straight out in the front, I dove in off the side and scrapped the whole bottom of the river. I scraped my nose, my elbows, my hip bones and anything else that was sticking out, and I nearly lost my bathing suit. For days, I wore a band aid on my nose, and with the way my bangs looked, it must have been funny. I started to cut my bangs, then decided not to cut them, so I had a few strains of hair hanging down in the middle of my forehead. I was lucky, though, because a boy named Claude dove off the same place and broke his neck and died.

Well, after we were friends with the Polish kids, we walked the tracks with them. The Polish kids brazenly walked upright across the tussle; and me, twelve years old, and my little sister, ten years old, crawled across the tussle on our hands and knees. Imagine looking down through the openings into the river below. We were petrified. If my mother had gone out into the yard from her work and looked up, we would never be able to go swimming again. After that, we went by way of the bridge. The tracks are for trains, not for kids.

I first went to St. Joseph's Church and School, and was brought up Catholic. When I was with my French friends, I went to St. Mary's Catholic Church. The mass was in French. When it was time for me to make my Confirmation, I was too late to make it in St. Joseph's Church (because we were in Fishers Island at the time), so I made it instead at St. Mary's Church (in French), and did not know the importance of being confirmed until years later when I read it in my Sunday Missile. My Missile read: "In Confirmation, the person receives the Holy Spirit which is Divine Love, Divine Wisdom, Divine Knowledge and Divine Fear." This is a good thing to know, especially knowing that if a person is afraid of getting in trouble, they will think twice before doing wrong.

On some Sundays, we went to St. Joseph's Church with our Polish friends, and the Mass was in Polish, so we didn't understand any of it. After Mass, all of the families went to the Polish Club for eating and dancing. We used to go with them too. When we grew up, we all went to the Polish Club for dancing to the really good Polish bands. The band gave out records, and one night I won "A String of Pearls," but I was too bashful to go to the stage to get it. All the young people in town went to the Polish Club, and many young men from Norwich came to the dances, met the girl of their dreams, married, and stayed in Willimantic. It seemed like the older children in the families married someone of the same nationality, whereas the younger ones, who seemed to be more Americanized, married someone of a different nationality. Examples are the Polish marrying French, or English or Italian etc. Finally, the day came when the Polish Club was no more, and the French Club was a mixture of many nationalities, as each generation chose their mates from outside of their family roots. Willimantic people "really became a League of Nations," as one teacher in St. Mary's school said.

Chapter 12: 18 Ash Street

We lived on Chapman Street for about a year, and then a lady who knew my mother had an apartment for rent, so she let us have it. The lady also put the lights in her name, so at least we had electricity. But again, a toilet and no bathtub, sink, or shower. Imagine having to take a bath in a basin in the kitchen sink. When you get down to your feet, you sit down in a chair and wash your feet in a basin. I am sure we are not the only ones who lived like that.

Around this time, I wanted to have beautiful feet, and I read in a magazine that if I put cold cream on my feet, I would have “beautiful feet.” So I put cold cream on my feet and wore socks to bed at night. Then, one day when I was visiting my friends, the Gaudettes in Scotland, we went swimming down to the river, and walked barefoot along the road. I didn’t know there were tiny sharp stones in the blacktop. When we got back, my feet were all cut and bloody. So much for beautiful feet.

I never liked to wear “hard shoes,” so I used to wear moccasins or penny-loafers. Then one day, I discovered how comfortable white tennis shoes were, so I wore them. When I went anywhere out of town “dressed up,” I wore high heeled shoes. It wasn’t long before I went into a store and bought low shoes. I would rather chose comfort over style.

In our house at 18 Ash Street, we had six rooms, three bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room, a front room, and a small bath room. Our furniture and other things came from friends and relatives. We liked living in this house. We had a shed and a very large backyard. We even planted a garden. There was a large tree in the yard, leaning on the roof of a shed, and someone cut out places for feet to climb up the tree. There was a comfortable place to sit on the crotch of the tree, and that is where I usually was. Reading.

I would bring my book, an apple, and some saltines and stay there as long as I could. I had to finish a story. When my friends came by for me to go somewhere, I said, "Not until I finish this story." At night, my mother would follow me around, putting out the lights and I would go to bed with a flashlight under the covers until I finished the story. She used to say that when I got old, I was going to have to wear thick glasses and not be able to see.

When I was really deep into a story, probably in a far away land, my Mother would call me. When I didn't answer, she would have to shake my shoulder to bring me back to the present.

My best place to read in the winter time was sitting in front of our big black stove with my feet at the oven. I was always cold, with poor circulation, low blood pressure, and below normal temperature.

We had ice skating at the park and we all used to go. They had a shed and also a bon fire for warming. I would sit, put on my skates, skate once around the ice, then take off my skates and go back to my warm oven. I always had a warm drink and a snack ready when the others came back, often with friends.

My family and I used to have to chop wood for our stove, and we burned coal for cooking and warmth, but the kitchen was always the only warm room in the house. Many times, we would take a bucket and go up Ash Street hill and pick coal up from the side of the tracks, where it fell off from the coal car as it went rushing by. Later, our big black stove was converted to oil, so then we had to go across the street to the gas station for a jug of oil.

We also had an ice box instead of a refrigerator, and had to be sure to empty the pan underneath before it overran. When we needed ice, we put a card "ICE" in the window for the iceman to bring another block of ice.

Chapter 13: Live and Learn

There are many people we meet along life's path that influence us even though we don't know it at the time. In the sixth grade at Noble, one of the girls wore a lot of make-up. The teacher used to say, "When a person uses so much make-up on her face, they are going to have holes in their face when they get older." That scared me because I knew a lady who had holes in her face. So to this day, I do not wear make-up.

In Noble School, grading was on a scale of one (F) to five (A). I got fives in all of my subjects, except for a two in math. I could never do math on paper, or think it in my head. When I got to the eighth grade, all the kids in my classroom went across the hall to the other eighth grade to learn algebra before going to high school. All except me—they put me on my desk, and out in the hall for the three weeks while the others learned algebra. Luckily, I know how to read and dream up my own stories or I would have been upset. When I got to high school and I was in the algebra class, the teacher said, after three weeks, "Bring me a paper from home and I will let you out of here." So I did.

All the time I was going to school, I worked too. I worked in the neighborhood, helping the old people. I had a red wagon and went to the store for them, cleaned out their sheds, got rid of their papers and bottles, and made a little spending money for the movies.

We had a trolley that we rode uptown on, and we had three movie houses. One of them was the Strand Theater. On Saturdays, they ran mostly a country western serial, and we hated to miss even one chapter. If we wanted to go to the movies and did not have any money, my two sisters would beg my mother for a half hour or so before she gave in. All this time I was sitting there reading, but was ready to go when she finally gave in.

I was always the different one—while they bought candy when they had money, I bought a big fat dill pickle from a barrel with my money. When we sat at the table to eat, I ate the dinner (meat, potatoes, vegetables and bread & butter) and didn't want dessert. The others ate dessert. In the afternoon, when I got hungry, I would go to the icebox (we did not have a refrigerator) to get some dessert, and it would be all gone, so I would make a fuss because they didn't leave me any. My mother would say, "You do it every time. You wait until the dessert is all gone then you want some."

"What is wrong with you?" My mother asked. If she said it once, she said it a hundred times. Another joke around the house was, "If you want to get rid of Claire, just start talking about someone," because I hated gossip and would get up and leave the room as soon I as my family started talking about someone. I wanted to treat people the way I wanted to and not let any idle gossip get in the way. Years later, when I worked for a bondsman, I stopped reading the newspaper because I wanted to treat all people good and not for what they did. I did not want my face to show any adverse feelings. I was the outsider. The family joke was that my older sister looked like my mother and my younger sister looked like my father and I looked like the mailman or the iceman or the milkman. I used to say, "I don't want to be a 'Meikle', I want to be a 'Brown'." My mother and sisters liked to joke and kid around, and I did not want to be bothered when I was reading. My mother would always say, "You never want to have any fun."

I was to care for more children than I can count. I babysat just about every child in our neighborhood. My sister often came with me, though I took care of her as well. I remember one house. We were babysitting two young children who were asleep, and we both sat together in one chair because we were scared to death. Not too long before that, we had seen a man, who had died young, and he was in the coffin right there in the same room. In those days, the wake

was in homes, and not in a funeral parlor. It seemed like we went to lots of funerals back in those days, and my little sister and I used to get nervous laughs and have to leave the room. We used to get like that in the hospital as well. We'd have to leave the floor where we were visiting, and go to another floor until we stopped laughing.

The day I graduated from grammar school, my friends and I went to the carnival. I had a beautiful white accordion pleated dress on, that Mrs. Jack Lutton went all the way to Norwich to buy for me. My friends were from a different school, and wore slacks. We went into a fun house. When I was sliding down the last slide, I held my skirt close and my feet were straight out and my shoes stuck on the down side of the slide. I fell on my face and started to cry, but laughed instead because they had a fat lady statue standing at the door, laughing. I said I hope my mother doesn't see me; but of course, she was just walking by the entrance at that moment, saw my bloody face, and got upset.

Chapter 14: A Smart Lady

My mother was very smart. She had gone to Bacon Academy in Colchester and could speak German. She taught us German songs and poems, she spoke Yiddish because a lot of Jewish people came from New York to farm there, and she had many Jewish friends. She knew a lot of sayings, especially Yankee sayings. She could sing "Yankee Doodle" in Yiddish. Years later when I was at ECSU, I was writing a paper on Yankees, and asked a professor how to spell some of the Yiddish words I remembered from the song. The professor roared with laughter then said: "A Jewish person from New York doesn't know 'Yankee Doodle.'"

One of the poems she used to say to us was:

Little Johnny would say: "I love you mother" and would run out to play,

Little Mary would say: "I love you mother" and would go with friends,

Little Nell would say: "I love you mother" and she would sweep the floor, mind the baby, and go to the store.

Now which one do you think loved mother best?

My mother had many fun sayings. When we were teenagers and thought we knew more than she did, she used to say, "Who is milking this cow?" She came from a farm. Another saying she said was, "What do you know about the war? You never shot a gun." That was to let us know we were not so smart after all. But if we insisted we were right, she would say, "pick up the marbles, you won."

She had a fun way of spelling towns or states. For instance, Willimantic— "will a boy tick, will a girl tick, will a woman tick, Will a man tic," or New York-- "a knife and a fork, a bottle and a cork, that is how you spell New York." And another one was: "If Missi ssiippi, lent Miss ouri her New Jersey what would Dela ware? I da ho, Al aska?" I put this story

in for fun because my mother used to talk to us a lot, with poems and songs and other languages and I wonder what other mothers talk to their children about.

My mother's sister, Annie Lucey, was often sick with bad headaches. So, my mother would go there to help her, but I never knew how she found the time to do so. It was a two-mile walk from our house to Annie's. We would go with our mother there. At Annie's house, my mother did her housework and took care of her. And me, being like my mother, took my two weeks vacation from work to care for my aunt when she was dying years later. Some relatives sitting in the kitchen were just talking about death and dying. I put them all out, except for my mother, because she did not talk about death or dying. After my two weeks were up, there wasn't anyone to care for my aunt, so she went to a convalescent home and then they had to put me out of the room because I was the only one crying.

One time when I was the babysitter, and waiting for the two little girls to come home from school in the afternoon, I fell asleep on the couch and dreamed. I dreamed that I was paralyzed and could not see, but could only hear people talking. Instead, I knew who was there by their voice. Since then, I feel sorry for people who are so ill that they can hear what is being said around them, but cannot talk. Only their eyes say something. I saw my aunt like that and a dear friend, Violet like that too. I was glad that I was able to help my aunt, because that is when I found out that my grandmother had a pauper's grave and did not have a stone, so I bought her a stone.

Chapter 15: Windham High School

When I was a freshman in high school and had a class in cooking, the teacher kept saying how much better I would look if I wore makeup. My friends were sick of hearing it, so they brought lots of make-up to school and fixed my face real good. The teacher did not have much to say, and I had a terrible time getting all the make-up off my face. Never again would I let them do that. Just a few days later, I was told to turn the oven on for baking, so I turned on the oven but did not know I had to light it. We already had a coal and wood stove. They told me to light the oven with a match. When I did, the match exploded in my face. It burned my hair in front, burned my eyebrows and eyelashes, and left red spots on my face and neck. So much for looking better.

According to a philosopher, there are three roads to take in life. The bottom road is: uncouth, partying, out in the world doing whatever the world does. I did my partying, time and time again, but always knew when to put a stop to it because there are more important things in the world than going out and having fun. Mediocre is in the middle: A person is born, goes to school, gets a job, gets married, has children, then grandchildren, and maybe great grandchildren, and then dies. The top road is the scholarly road: reading, studying, and trying to make a better world for people. I choose this road a very long time ago.

In my class yearbook, someone wrote: "Life is what you make it" next to my picture and I asked everyone: "who wrote it" but no one seemed to know. I can't imagine who wrote it, but to me it was like a challenge in life, and I hope I have met the challenge.

Chapter 16: Work

I babysat many of my relatives' little children. I babysat for my aunt's kids. She had only two kids, but my great aunt who lived about five blocks away would send her three grandchildren for me to babysit. I didn't want to refuse her because she was old. My aunt also worked in a beauty parlor, and whenever customers needed a babysitter, she sent me. Some days when I only had two kids to watch, I would take them to my house and clean the whole house. When my mother came home from work she would say, "I see Claire was here today, the house is clean."

I got my first "working papers" at age sixteen and went to work at the Braid Shop making braids. I had to turn a handle at the top to start the machine, and then I made sure the machine didn't stop. One day, from turning the handle so much, my whole right side got paralyzed and I couldn't sit or lay down for awhile. I had ten machines running all the time and I wasn't very strong. I worked 1 week days and 1 week nights during the summer. Being young, I didn't let the paralysis bother me. I went swimming at Columbia Lake with my friends and dove off the raft, sideways, and after awhile the paralysis went away. When I got my first big pay, I went to the record store and bought an album of Strauss Waltz. I don't know when I started liking them, but these waltzes are still my favorite music.

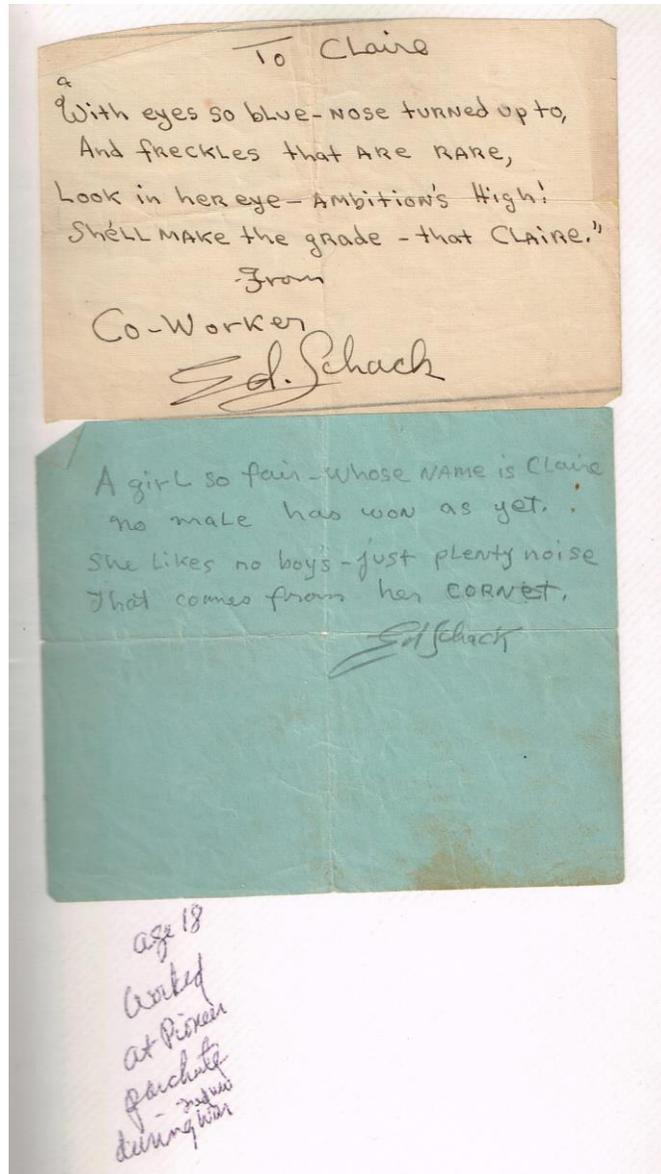
When I was a teenager, I did a lot of work in the neighborhood. I did housework for the lady across the street from my house. I used to wash and wax Mrs. Rabinowitz's floors, polish silverware, as well as complete other chores. Mrs. Rabinowitz lived upstairs over her son's grocery store. Her son, Louie, the grocer, got me a job one time working as waitress at the Country Club for parties (American Thread Co. had their parties there). Louis said he got me the job because I was a plain person and not all dressed up with make-up and jewelry. I took that as

a nice compliment. I also worked in several mills at one time or another after school: the Braid Shop and the Electro Motive Mfg, both South Park Street and Bridge Street plants and got an 'E' during the war.

When I was 17 years old, my younger sister, Margie, and I went to Colchester to stay with a Cousin Frances and her little boy Johnny during the summer. There, I went to work at *S and S Leather Company*. The first job they gave me was putting creases in wallets on a hot plate. I was always getting burned from this job. Then they had me placing I.D. cards in wallets. When I sat on a high stool in the hot summer, I used to fall asleep because it was monotonous. The boss used to holler at me all the time.

One day, an elderly lady, who I had never seen before, put her finger in my face and said, "You are a Brown." I was really happy to know who I looked like beside the milkman or the iceman or the mailman. It turned out the lady was my mother's cousin, Sylvia Brown, and I got to be good friends with her and her children, Johnny, Moe and Mary. They took me horseback riding one day – bareback – and the horse went directly to some water, and bent down to drink. I was horrified. They had to help me off that horse – never again.

When I was 18 years old, I went to work with my mother at the Cheney Mills in Manchester, Connecticut. We worked for Pioneer Parachutes during the Second World War. Because I was 18 years old, I could work 10 hours a day, so that was generally my hours each day. My mother sewed parachutes, and I put the grommets in them for the laces. I sat on a high stool (again) and had a foot press, and every once in awhile my foot would go down by reflex, and I would cut a finger. My poor mother would get worried every time she saw me coming by her, holding my hand, with blood dripping. I was glad when the summer was over and I was back to school.



From one of Claire's co-workers at Pioneer Parachutes

After the summer, we returned home, and I went job hunting for after school. I started on the right side of Main Street and went in every office or store, all the way up to High Street. Then, I crossed over and went down the left side of Main Street in every store or office. No one needed any help until I came almost to the end and Hallock's Restaurant needed a waitress. Working at Hallock's started my work in food places which was to last about 50 years.

When I worked as a waitress, I used to have a big meal and go home with a lot of tip money. I worked with Alice Fowler, who was fourteen years older than me, and she was such a wonderful person. We used to call Mr. & Mrs. Clark "Blondy" and "Dagwood" because they had funny little spats. Many years later, I worked with Alice again in the Clark House, and I was able to tell her that she was my role model before she passed away in her nineties.

One day I ran across the street to Mrs. Rabinowitz, and fell up the couple stone steps leading to the stairs. Being embarrassed, I ran up the stairs fast. When I got up there, I was dizzy and had to lay down on her couch, unable to work. I had scrapes and cuts from the cement, and my poor circulation was what made me sick. I did not go to school the next day, and when I went to the office with my paper, the lady said, "Everybody else in the world falls down the stairs but you have to fall up them." I was a trial to her. Every day in homeroom, I got excused to go to the typing room. However, every day the teacher forgot, and every first period I was called to the office.

I also used to have toothache, when all my teeth ached at once, I would stay home and have to see the nurse at school the next day. I'm sure they didn't believe me, but I found out what the problem was years later.

My freshman year was not the best. I had first period, English, with a brand new teacher, and I also had her for second period Math. I never talk back to anyone, especially a teacher, but I had a bad habit of shrugging my shoulder when she said anything to me. She called me "Lady Jane." I did not know who Lady Jane was for years. The Textile Museum had a paper doll book for sale that had a beautiful paper doll with lots of fancy clothes to put on the doll, so evidently the teacher thought that I thought that I was a fancy lady. O contraire. Mrs. Jack Lutton, a friend

of my mom and I, who was in my school to get her high school diploma, and was in my class, became very upset because she didn't like the teacher picking on me every day.

Well, this teacher, when it came to the end of the year, said my grade was an A but she was giving me a C because she did not like my attitude. I had all B's and should have been on the B Honor Roll, but after that I said "why I should bother?" My mother was not the type of person to go to the school to protest. Besides, she was always working. What saved me that year was because my old friend since childhood, Johnny Costello, sat with me every lunch period in the cafeteria. He was a wonderful, wonderful person.

In my last year (and sixth) in an English class, the teacher said the record showed that I did the best work of anyone in English every year. This class was during the second World War time, and one day a returning soldier looked across the room and said, "Claire. what are you still doing here?"

Chapter 17: Elks Fair

We had many wonderful times in Willimantic, especially the Elks Fair. The Elks Fair was held every year since 1913, in the backyard of the Elk's Home, on Pleasant Street across from the footbridge. Everyone, both young and old, couldn't wait until it was time for the Elk's Fair, even though it meant that summer was over and time to go back to school. The Fair was always held at the end of August.

Entering the grounds, over on the left side was the flower show. Behind the flower show were the swings for kids to ride on. There were many events to see and do. It was like a regular carnival with all kinds of booths and food. There was a stage for contests. One year, my little sister won first prize. She was dressed as a little old lady. There was dancing on the platform later in the evening. It was a wonderful fair we had, year after year for all the years we were growing up. Then, in 1952, they said, "No more Elk's Fair." I believe this decision was made because every year they raffled off a brand new car and the politicians said, "That was gambling and Connecticut does not allow gambling," so they took away the most important event Willimantic had every year. Of course, somewhere along the way, the politicians changed their minds about gambling.

Chapter 18: Watch Hill, Rhode Island

The first year, I went to the beach to work at the Narragansett Inn (now called the Watch Hill Inn). My friend and I saw an ad in the newspaper that said they needed waitresses, so we went just for a lark. We had to take the train from Willimantic to New London and from there, another train to Westerly, Rhode Island. Then we took a bus to Watch Hill. This was at the time during the war years, and when there was a blackout.

The lady who owned the Inn said, "You girls must be hungry." She gave us a pan of chicken bones that had been picked clean, so we ran down to a restaurant and ate grilled ham and cheese sandwiches and chocolate milkshakes. I can still remember how good it tasted. The next day, the lady gave us uniforms. Mine was about five sizes too big. I weighed only one hundred pounds all of my life. We had to put a giant pleat down the whole back of the dress before I could wear it.

The young people who worked there for the summer, in different jobs, were mostly college kids. There was Doug who was going to Tufts Dental College (I went out with him once), George Tedford, and Howard Barr (called Candy bar). Howard Barr's mother was the pastry chef at the hotel and she lived in Westerly. Mrs. Barr let us stay there for the weekends when we were no longer working there. Another guy there was Ed Beattie. Years later, I got to be friends with his sons, Ed, Mike and Scottie. There was a guy named Eddie DeFannie, who kissed me on the forehead because of my bashfulness and because the guys named me "Miss Unsociable of 1948." My boyfriend, JB, from Willimantic came to Watch Hill once and liked it there. He also came after me when the summer was over and I went home.

At Watch Hill, there was a beautiful merry-go-round for the children, a wonderful beach, and a special store that had many, many different kinds of ice cream. There were wonderful

restaurants, *The Greeks* and *Sissons*, and many more places to eat on the beach. There were clothing stores, gift shops, a drug store, a guy who painted portraits and said I had a face like a pixie, a Linen store, a newspaper store, a book store, and a fish market (where Candy Bar worked).

In those days we did not have drugs, and I do not remember anyone getting drunk. However, we often went to the Misquamicut partying, and to Westerly. We had fun, singing songs such as "From the Tables Down at Moreys" and "Them Bones, Them Bones," as well as many others. We had many beach parties, and some nights we danced. Watch Hill had strict rules. Guys weren't even allowed to go walking on the street without a shirt on. Some of the kids we hung around with were from Watch Hill, and they knew the rules. There were strict rules on the beaches and on the docks as well.

During one early evening, a young boy took us for a boat ride on a row boat. By the time we got back, it was getting dark. I was the last one getting out of the boat, and I lost my grip and fell back into the water. I was so scared of jellyfish stings that I practically flew back into the boat. They helped lift me back up to the dock. I was wearing new clothes, slacks, a shirt, and loafers. However, I didn't lose my shoes in the water. I was very wet, and then this kid, Jimmy, said, "Try not to look like you are wet, as we are not supposed to be out in a boat at this time." Then I went slosh slosh up the dock, across the road, along the side of the Inn, and down to the cottage where we lived with other workers, trying not to look like I was wet.

We met some wonderful people at the hotel. One family was the Heinz family; the father and his little three year old son, John, along with a nursemaid. The little boy grew up to be John Heinz running for a political office. I have his political button for old times' sake.

There was one lady who wanted breakfast in bed every morning, so I brought it up to her. There were some people who were known as 'nuevo riche.' They spoke French at the table, and this gave them away. Old rich never talked like that, and old rich would put the tip money in an envelope and hand the envelope to the waitress at the end of the week.

There was one nice lady there who was the 'grand dame' of the family and when she came into the dining room, the men and boys would stand up, someone would seat her, and then they sat. She had her eightieth birthday there, and was given an orchid to wear. She was so healthy that she would go for a brisk walk in the morning, and a swim in the afternoon. I put her face in my mind and said I want to be like her when I get to be eighty. She was my first role model.

One of the families at the hotel had a little three-year-old girl. I often babysat her. When summer was over, they asked me to go with them, up north in the spring, autumn, and to Florida in the winter, but I said no. I never wanted to be too far away from my family.

One night we had dates and went to the Norwich Inn to a party. My date was a Chinese young man named George Lee. He was the handy man at the Inn, and he carried the luggage for the guests. He and I were good friends. He was going to college, and I can't remember if it was Harvard or Yale, but he was going to be in a show in the next semester so I was his coach. I helped him study for his part.

On Watch Hill, there was a nice Catholic Church around the corner from our cottage. We went to Confession on Saturday night, so we weren't allowed to eat or drink after midnight, because we were going to Communion on Sunday morning. It is too bad that the Church changed the rules, because it kept a lot of us out of trouble. At the end of summer one year, I was waiting for my ride back home. I was the only one left and it was lonesome, so I helped the lady

clean up and put things away. In exchange, she gave me all the little prayer books she had when she was little. That was nice of her. She went to church every morning, but didn't always practice being nice. One day, the cook, standing at the stove, looked like she was having a heart attack and my friend and I both went to help her. We had her sit down, but the owner wanted her to keep on cooking. My friend was so angry over her disregard of the cook, that my friend stopped going to church. As far as I know, she never went to church again. I, on the other hand, would not let anyone sway my faith. This is what I mean about planting good seeds in the spring of life.

My favorite parable is about the sower who went out to sow his seeds. After sowing the seeds, only the seeds that fell on good ground grew and flourished. Some seeds never flourish, and some seeds grow, then die at the first adverse circumstance. So, I have used this parable for many questions I might have.

I had three wonderful summers when I worked at Watch Hill, and many years afterward, when we continued to go there. My family, mother, Martha, Clint Grylls, and Clint, Jr (when he was a baby), had come down to Watch Hill check the place over. They said they all loved it there.

Many times, my friends and I went for day trips to the beach. I took my family there quite often, as I had a car. I used to give each of my nieces and nephews turns to go. One summer, I took my mother, my nephew Randy, and my niece Robin to Watch Hill for a week. In those days, it was cheap, and the rooms over at *Sissons Restaurant* were ten dollars a night or fifty dollars a week. So they gave us a very large room and put four beds in it, and the cost was fifty dollars for the week. It seems unbelievable.

I had just so much money to spend, and I gave each person a certain amount of money every morning, and said, "This is what you each have for food for the day, and if you want ice cream at night, you have to figure it out for yourselves." They had to check the menu's amount for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as well as save some for ice cream.

Well, we did fairly well with the money, but by Friday we were broke. I had to call my brother-in-law, Clint, to come and get us. We did have a very good week, but couldn't stay for Saturday and Sunday. The lady in charge, Ann Sisson, said, "Because you didn't stay for a week I want to give you back twenty dollars." But I said "no." The kids begged me to take the money but I said, "no." We stayed for five days and it was ten dollars a day, so that was fifty dollars. If I took the money we could eat, but we wouldn't have a place to stay, so it was only fair not to take the money.

Many years later when I was doing my family tree, I found that the Sissons from Westerly and Watch Hill were my grandmother's relatives, and I was really happy to know that Ann Sisson was not just a relative, but a wonderful person.

My grandmother, Martha Esther Knapp, was the daughter of Lorenzo Dow Knapp and Julia Ann Gould. Julia was the daughter of Jonathan Gould and Elvira Sisson. My great grandmother, Julia, is buried in Westerly. I think Lorenzo is as well, because they couldn't find his burial where he is listed.

Chapter 19: Oneida Park

The last summer I was working at the Narragansett Inn, one of the families asked me to work at their home in Oneida Park. It was a very wealthy section of Greenwich, Connecticut. Greenwich is a lovely town with a beautiful Main Street with lawns and trees. I lived there on the third floor and had one day a week off. I had to take a taxi to go to church on Sundays or to go shopping downtown in Greenwich.

I was alone most of the time with only the dog and the bird to talk to and a taxi driver who asked for a date, but I said no because I would never date a stranger. I was the only maid for the people, the mother, the young son, and the daughter. I worked for them. After the father died, the family had to live on a monthly allowance and couldn't afford any other help besides me. They spent their summers in Watch Hill and their winters in Greenwich, so they did not need year round help. I lived there on the third floor and had one day a week off. I was alone most of the time.

I cleaned all the house, three floors, cooked the meals, and did the shopping. I also took care of a long, tan daschund named Taffy, and a bird named Peter who could say, "Kiss, kiss, Peter." Peter would sometimes mess up the mirrors and windows for me to clean when the young people let him loose. It wasn't very often, however, because they were usually away at school. The girl was at a school for young ladies, and the boy was attending Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

I used to wear my own ordinary clothes for cleaning. Then, when I finished cooking, I would put on my maid's outfit, a black dress with a white apron and a white maid's hat. The family would be sitting in the front room, and I would go into the front room through one way

and say: "Dinner is served," and then I would go through another door into the dining room and serve the meal. I learned how to serve correctly at the inn in Watch Hill.

I made a beautiful Thanksgiving dinner (my mother taught me how to cook), and at the last minute, they were invited out so I sat and ate, and ate, and ate. I didn't want to waste my whole Thanksgiving dinner. When I told the lady I wanted to go home for Christmas, she said "no." The same day, like Thanksgiving day, would come again and I would be alone. So, I quit the job. I never missed a Christmas at home.

I only did this for a lark anyway, because I wanted to be a writer, and I needed experience. One day, I had to put on my maid's outfit and deliver a message to a neighbor. However, I brought the message to a smaller house at the gate (the caretaker's house), not the bigger house. That is how things were done.

So, in the end, I took another train ride and went home. I never went back to Oneida Park, but I often went back to Watch Hill.

Chapter 20: America's Spring

It was in the Spring of life in America that people tilled the land in order to grow farms with crops to live on. Farms sprang up all over the New England states. The Natives, who were here for many, many years before, helped the people who came from England to survive the first winter, which was very cold. My mother's family was among the first settlers in Massachusetts (John Howland and Elizabeth Tilley of the Mayflower), and our ancestors later moved to Connecticut and Rhode Island. My Grandmother's family came from North Kingston, Rhode Island. The Goulds, Knapps, Sissons and the Browns were from Lynn, Massachusetts.

My mother's family was called "Swamp Yankees." My mother said that the first people to be born in the new world were "Yankees." The Dutch who came over settled in New York, and I believe that they were the first to call English people "yanker," and that sounded like "yankee," so the name stuck. England, on the other hand, had a nickname of John Bull, and in the Dutch language, Jan or Yan means John. People born in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut are Yankees. So I imagine my mother was right. There is a story that the name "Swamp Yankee" came about because in North Kingston, Rhode Island. In North Kingston, there was a town called Swamp Town. People couldn't use seawater for growing their crops, so they lived near a swamp for the water. My grandmother's family, the Gould's and Sisson's came from this area, as well as the Anthony family. Because they came from Swamp Town, one of the Anthonys told me they were "Swamp Yankees." Other people say the name came from Mystic at the time of the Pequot War, when people were afraid and hid in the swamps. However, I would rather believe my mother's reasoning, as it sounds right to me.

The English people, especially the soldiers, had a great time with the name "Yankee," and they made up a song: "Yankee Doodle" to make fun of the new Americans. This song caught on.

From this simple little song, people refer Americans as "Yankees." The son's name and words changed many times, but the tune remained. Today, it is the state song of Connecticut. Even the people at the Capitol, who had many songs to choose from, remained faithful to Yankee Doodle Dandy. We people from Connecticut take pride in our state, and the tradition is the adoption of emblems and symbols, including our state song. Here are some the words to Yankee Doodle Dandy (today's song is slightly different from the past):

Yankee Doodle went to town

Riding on a pony.

Stuck a feather in his hat

And called it macaroni

In England, during the days of Cromwell, a plume set in a hat was called "macaroni." The lyrics of Yankee Doodle refer to this English "plume set." The song's chorus is as follows:

Yankee Doodle keep it up,

Yankee Doodle Dandy

Mind the music and the step,

And with the folks be handy.

These are the old lyrics to the chorus:

Yankee Doodle keep it up,

Yankee Doodle Dandy,

Mind the music and the step,

And with the girls be handy.

Evidently, the ballad of Yankee Doodle (the tune) came to us by way of France, Holland, and England. The English called the tune "Lucky Lucy lost her locket". In Holland, it was called

“The Buttermilk Song.” From Holland, perhaps it came to America with the Pilgrims, who spent twelve years in Holland before sailing out to the New World.

Chapter 21: North Stonington, Connecticut

My grandmother was born in North Stonington and married in Colchester, Connecticut, where my mother was born. An amazing fact I found when I was doing our family history was the fact that way back in the 1600's, my grandmother and grandfather had a common ancestor: Isaac Wheeler, who started the Town of North Stonington, Connecticut. That was quite a surprise to me knowing many years later that my grandmother had a pauper's grave in a strange town with no stone to show her passing.

My mother grew up on a farm in Colchester, Connecticut. It was her grandfather's farm. My grandfather was known as "Farmer Brown." My mother's grandfather also owned a grain store, and my mother had to drive the horse and wagon to the store for grain and bring it back to the farm. She had other farm chores too, so I am not surprised that when she was 18 years old, she came to Willimantic to work at the American Thread Company. Her mother, in her mid-60's at the time, came with my mother and worked in the mill as well. Later, I worked in the same mill, just as my family had. My mother's father had been an attendant, or some kind of a worker at the Norwich State Hospital, and possibly this had a bearing on how he thought and behaved.

My grandfather, George Franklin Brown, who was called Tocky, was so furious that his wife and my mother left, that he never spoke to my mother again as long as he lived. He never spoke to any of us either. "Swamp Yankees" are known for their habit to never, never speak to anyone once they got mad at them. My grandmother was not like that, and neither am I. Instead, it is my habit to buy a present for someone I might have offended by way of appeasement.

My grandmother did go back to Colchester after a year, because her son was going off to war. It was 1917 and the First World War was going on. Her son joined the Famous Connecticut

Yankee Division. Later, my grandmother came back to Willimantic to be near my mother, and her other daughter, Annie, who had moved here.

Of course, I did not know it until I researched my grandmother's family history that my grandmother's first five babies died at birth, and then she had a son and two daughters. My mother was her youngest, so of course she would not let her youngest daughter go to a strange town and do a strange job alone.

My mother was brought up in the Congregational Church and when she later married my father, who was a Catholic at St. Joseph's, she had to take a vow to bring her children up as Catholics. I was born in St. Joseph's Hospital, and later went to St. Joseph's School and St. Joseph's Church.

We had a single parent home long before it was a common occurrence, and we were latch-key kids. We had spent our early school years at a Catholic school and went to a Catholic Church. When anything would go wrong with me, it was my habit to go into the church and sit there and cry. There was no one at home to cry to so I cried to God. It was the beginning of my depending on God for everything. When a person says the "Our Father" often enough, they know that God is there for them to replace an earthly father that isn't there for them. One day I sat there and cried all day and when my family couldn't find me, they knew where to go – to St. Joseph's Church.

Chapter 22: My Irish Grandmother

My father's mother came to the United States at age sixteen, through Ellis Island in the late 1880's. My grandmother was born to John Griffin and Mary Sullivan in Glamorganshire, Wales. Although they lived in Wales, my family was Irish.

My grandmother's family worked in the mills. Fortunately for them, they lived in a house on the corner of High Street and Prospect Street, on the same corner as the high school. Some of her relatives lived on Card Street, at the bottom of Hosmer Mountain. One of these relatives living here was her uncle. Her uncle, a farmer, always wore his boots, because he was a farmer, and everyone called him Paddy Boots Sullivan. I understand that today, the Lamberts live in this same house on Card Street.

Other Irish families who lived on Kerry (Carey) Hill were not so lucky, because the time came when the Irish workers went on strike, and the mill owners had their shanties burned down to the ground. Because their houses were burned down, the Irish families had to live in tents at Horseshoe Bridge, on the other side of the river. This was called Tent City. The people living here, I believe, were Willimantic's first homeless people.

Chapter 23: St. Joseph's Church

English people had a problem with the Irish and Scots, because they were Catholics. The English mill owners were Protestants. These English mill owners made a room over the store, what is now the Windham Textile Museum, and had masses for the workers. However, the problem was that these English mill owners preached the Protestant Bible, while the workers were Catholics. So, there was a disagreement between the two. The Protestants had churches, but the Catholics had to meet in homes in the beginning, then later on the top floor of a building on Main Street, over which was later John's Framing Shop. Then, the Catholics were fortunate enough to buy land on Jackson Street for a church and a rectory. The church was named St. Joseph's, and today it is still a wonderful Church that looks like a Cathedral. They have a rose window and other beautiful windows. The parishioners were the Irish, Scots, Italian, Polish and French, until the French Canadians built their own Cathedral-like church in early 1900's.

My father's family was devout Catholics, and sent their children to St. Joseph's School and Church. Their children carried on the tradition, except my father, of course, who quit school. My mother, a Congregationalist, went to church with us, but my father never did.

St. Joseph's meant a lot to our family and to the town of Willimantic. My whole family attended St. Joseph's church and school, we were all baptized there, we all made our First Communion at St. Joseph's. Also, some of my family is buried at St. Joseph's cemetery. St. Joseph's Rectory is next door to the church. Standing in front of the rectory, there is a life-sized white-colored statue of St. Joseph, with his right hand over his heart, and a flower lily on his left arm. St. Joseph is a worker.

Across the street from the church is a red brick, long, double building that used to

be the first hospital in Willimantic. It was built in 1907. The right side of this building was the home of the sisters who taught at St. Joseph's school. In front of the building where the sisters lived are statues of Our Lady and St. Joseph.

In 1909, St. Joseph's Training School for Nurses started at St. Joseph's. The school trained hundreds of young women, certifying them as nurses. For over twenty-five years, St. Joseph's Hospital served not only Windham-Willimantic, but Andover, Ashford, Canterbury, Colchester, Columbia, Eastford, Franklin, Hampton, Hebron, Lebanon, Mansfield, Scotland, Sprague and Willington. St. Joseph's has done its share to bring good health and blessings to these areas, and the church remains to help the community. When I was a girl scout, my troop had our meetings at St. Joseph's, on the side where the sisters had an extra room for visitors. There is a unique spiral staircase in that side of the building.

At one time, the left side of the building was a Home for the Aged. Then, when St. Joseph's Living Center was established, the left side of the building was turned into a shelter for the homeless families. Today, the name of the living center is "Holy Family Home and Shelter." The shelter is run by Sisters of Charity. Sister Peter is currently in charge, and Diane Lambert is currently in charge of Catholic Charities.

In front of the building is a white life-sized statue of Jesus with his arms spread out as though to say: "Come to me you who are weary and I will give you rest." Just like the Statute of Liberty says.

Although the later immigrants saw the Statue of Liberty when they arrived in America, Plymouth Rock was where the first immigrants saw America, and where the pilgrims knelt down on their knees and thanked God. Plymouth in Massachusetts grew, and people multiplied and ventured out to other areas within America. Some people went north to Maine,

New Hampshire, and Vermont, and some went south to Rhode Island and Connecticut. The arrival of immigrants is where our story starts.

Chapter 24: Pearl Street

When we decided to move to Pearl Street, we had four rooms of furniture and they wanted fifty dollars a room to move us. We did not have the money. I was walking down Main Street near Star Furniture store when it came to me that Jesus said, "Sell all that you have and follow me."

So I went in the store, and Sam Moskowitz, the owner, took our furniture, gave us credit for it, and brought it to his store. He sold us new furniture, which he sent to our new apartment. I was able to pay him little by little. He said he usually put a number on secondhand furniture, so he put "Claire" under all of my furniture.

I went for a job at Pratt & Whitney in East Hartford, and took a test for typist in an office. Even though I typed eighty words a minute, I was so interested in reading the script that that I typed badly and didn't get the office job. Instead they put me out in the building that had shipping and receiving.

I had to get a physical, so when the doctor saw me, he said, "How did you get in here?" I still weighed seventy-five pounds. I do not like needles, and after having three needles, the doctor told the nurse to give me another because he wanted to know why I was so thin. It turned out that I was anemic and that is why I always felt like fainting. So, my mother had to walk me to work. My mother took me to her doctor, and in three weeks time, my blood was normal.

It happened that my neighbor, Isabel Curol, was a nurse at Pratt and Whitney. When I asked her why my back sometimes got all "pins and needles" in it, and she said that when I picked up something heavy, my bones squeezed my nerves and that made the "pins and needles." So, I am very careful about lifting heavy things.

One trouble with the job at Pratt was the hours I worked there. I got picked up in a limo that went to the job. Then, I was the first one picked up at twelve noon, before the driver drove around picking up other passengers. Next, I worked from three o'clock to ten or eleven o'clock. I usually got home at either one o'clock or two o'clock the next morning. The first week, I ended up working nine days in a row. All this time, my mother was alone in our upstairs apartment and she was scared to death.

I lived in such a weird apartment. I called it a haunted house. For one thing, an old couple owned the house and lived downstairs. The wife was deaf, and because of that the front door (the only way we had out), the apartment was always locked. My mother was scared all the time. If something happened, could she get out? I happened to be gone most of the time working. I had to get her out of there.

Going upstairs in our apartment, there was a long hall. On the right side was a front room connected to a bedroom. The bedroom had a door into the hall. At the end of the hall was the bathroom, and stairs leading to the attic. On the left side of the hall was a door into a small dining room, and then into a small kitchen. The stove was ancient and something always smelled of iodine. A dentist had had his office up there years before.

One night, my mother heard footsteps going up the stairs to the empty attic. She called out, "Is that you, Mr. So & So?" No answer. One day after she went downtown, she saw tiny white footprints in the hall, and followed them into the kitchen. Evidently, the people let their two-year-old granddaughter in our kitchen, and she spilled a box of flour all over and walked it in. My mother found some pieces of wood in her clothes closet that weren't there before. In the apartment, we had to lock all of our doors, including the bathroom, and had to unlock the door whenever we wanted to go.

I quit Pratt & Whitney after three months because it made me sick to work there. I was in what they called the "bull pen," an enclosure with rails around it instead of walls. It was a small place with four working spaces, and people were supposed to change places every week, because making labels was bad. They stuck me with making labels for all the time I was there. The ladies who worked there spoke "dirty" to every man that came to the railing for shipping and receiving. They told me I either join or else, so I, being the person I was, took the "or else."

The boss took me to work with him, and the ladies wouldn't even let me go to supper with them. I told the boss I was sorry that I had to quit but he said it was okay because I was a good worker. He said he would rather work with a truck load of men than those four ladies. All the time I was there I had a headache and even caught a cold. I had to get out of there and out of that house too.

I let it be known to people that I wanted to live closer to Main Street. The Ricards who owned two houses on Valley Street let my mother and I move into their apartment, and they moved into the house in the backyard. They are nice people who are in my family circle.

Now, I have the town hall, post office, library, stores, restaurants, and St. Paul's Soup Kitchen. I also found work around my block, the Main Street office of Heller's, where I worked three times because they always wanted me back. On Main Street, I don't ever need a car again. I have the bus and a nice bus driver named Mark.

Chapter 25: Willimantic Area

I love Willimantic. It is one of most unique places that I've ever known. Willimantic, Connecticut is in a basin (noted by Dr. Pocock, ECSU), and that is why we do not have much damage from storms as other towns do. Many times, the bad weather stops in Bolton, Connecticut.

It would not be a Willimantic story without the Frogs of Windham. I took the information from the book "The Tale of the Windham Frog" that Annie Wandell gave me.

In 1756, people in Connecticut were afraid that the Native Americans might come in the night to fight with them. One night, the people heard strange noises and got out of bed and were ready to fight their foes. Nothing happened. Then in the morning, people cautiously came out of their houses and were very surprised to see hundreds and hundreds of frogs. On Route 14, which was near the pond, something happened to the water and that is why the frogs littered the road and yards near the pond.

The symbol for Willimantic is a spool of thread with a frog sitting on it. This is for the American Thread Company, nationally known, and for the Frogs of Windham. This symbol is everywhere. It is on the class rings for Windham High School and in many other places. And, of course, we have a bridge of frogs called The Frog Bridge. I can't forget the Frog Bridge.



Claire's very own picture of the "Bridge to Nowhere" featuring the frog bridge in Willimantic. Claire made this in her art class at ECSU.

It was my habit to go to every first meeting that came up in Willimantic. It might be for the homeless, or the poor, or the handicapped, the Hotel Hooker, Third Thursday, or schools. So when it was announced that there would a meeting for the Frog Bridge, of course, I went. As a matter of fact, I have a copy of the original drawing of bridge on the wall in my house.

When it came for a writing of the minutes, they didn't know what to put down for me, because I have no title. So, they put down "citizen," and that is exactly what I am: a good patriotic citizen of Willimantic, Connecticut, and the United States of America.

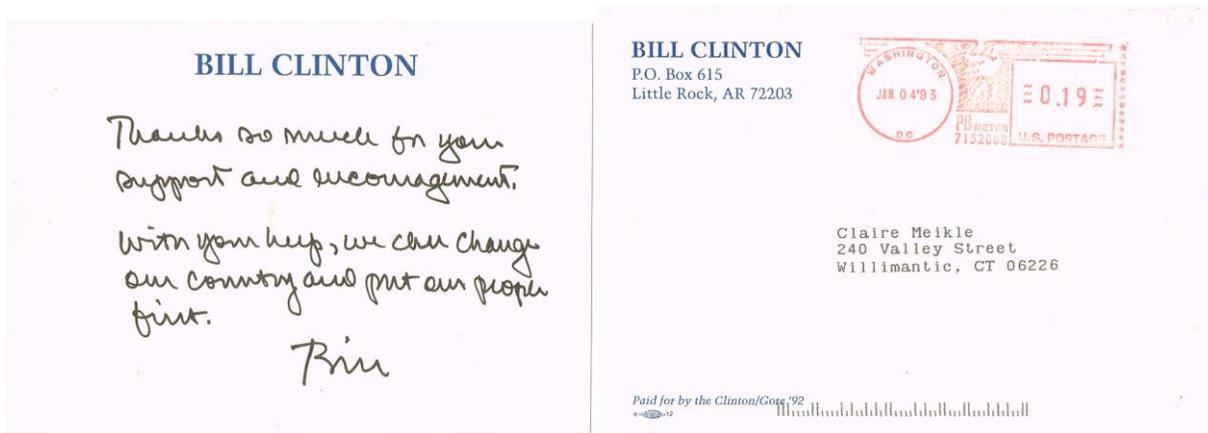
I have a paper that shows what the duties of a citizen are, which I mention here:

1. The duty to obey the laws (if a person obeys God's laws, they will not come under man's laws)
2. The duty to respect the rights of others (do unto others as you would want to be done to)
3. The duty to inform yourself on issues of government and community welfare
4. The duty to vote in elections
5. The duty to serve on juries if called

6. The duty to serve and defend your country
7. The duty to assist agencies of law enforcement and
8. The duty to practice and teach the principles of good citizenship in your home.

Did I forget to mention that I love the City of Willimantic, Connecticut, New England, and the United States of America, and I like to believe that I am very patriotic and do my duty as a citizen of this great country of ours. I feel bad because we (The United States of America) were supposed to have May 1st as our Patriotic Day, but ours was cancelled because Russia has May 1st as their day. Our Fire Departments and Police Departments are the only people who celebrate the day. It was supposed to be in the schools and in the churches, but now it is the little children who lose out.

I helped in the rebuilding of the Statue of Liberty and the Second World War Monument. I also sent family photos to Ellis Island for their special program, and wrote to my Congressmen when I have something to say. I wrote to the then President, Bill Clinton, and received eight letters in return, including one from one of his lawyers when I wrote to free Leonard Peltier (the Native American) who was wrongly accused.



I also have written to our Connecticut Senators when the subject is important. It was supposed to go into the schools and churches to teach children. It wouldn't be fair if I didn't put in Your Rights as a Citizen.

1. The right to equal protection of laws and equal justice in the courts
2. The right to be free from arbitrary search or arrest
3. The right to equal educational and economic opportunity
4. The right to choose public offices in free elections
5. The right to own property
6. The right of free speech, press and assembly
7. The right to attend the church of your choice and
10. The right to have legal counsel of your choice and a prompt trial if accused of crime.

The motif for May 1, Law Day USA is "No man is above the law and no man is below the LAW" (Theodore Roosevelt).

Willimantic is unique because it is the only city in our area surrounded by countryside living. There is North Windham, Mansfield, Chaplin, Hampton, Willington and Coventry to the north. To the west is Columbia and to the south is Lebanon and South Windham. To the east is Windham Center and Scotland. Surrounding Willimantic are many hills – to the south there is Bush Hill, Chestnut Hill, Cook's Hill, Liberty Hill, Gates Hill, Owunegunset Hill, Commons Hill, Sweet Hill, Kick Hill, and Babcock Hill. To the north is Beaver Hill, Monument Hill, Ripley Hill, Spring Hill, Hanks Hill, Tower Hill, Wormwood Hill, Bear Hill, Shaw Hill, Puddin Hill, and a mountain Wiley Mountain. To the west of Willimantic is Clark's Hill, Cooper Hill, and to the east is Murphy Hill, Beaver Hill, Miller Hill, Chestnut Hill, and Mullen Hill. Ashford

and Willington also have hills, which are included in the Eastern Hills. Willimantic is in the Green Corner, which is the northeast corner of Connecticut.

Our highest point north, near the Mansfield line is about 350 to 400 feet. Hosmer Mountain to the south is 500 feet and Miller Hill to the east is 358 feet. The hill in Columbia in the west is 250 feet, and Ash Street hill going towards Mansfield is also 250 feet high. Obwebetuck, which means a view of the river, is the highest point in Windham, and is 637 feet in the South Windham-Lebanon area.

Willimantic is also unique because it has a "dome" (Jim Ely helped me describe this). The city contains a "dome," because it is surrounded by hills and mountains. Our dome is at Main Street. If you look towards the south of Main Street, you will see that the land slopes towards the Willimantic River, especially at Railroad Street and Bridge Street. Also, Union Street from Main Street (near Dunham Street) goes sharply uphill, and from Dunham Street to Milk Street, the land is a mound which includes Carey Hill, Chapman Street and Ash Street hill. The land levels off at Valley Street and Jackson Street and Spring Street and Maple Avenue before it starts to climb again to the north hillside (Mansfield). Across Main Street, the hills going south are Jillson Hill, Mountain Street, Bridge Street and Hosmer Mountain. In the west, the road to Columbia goes up, and in the east, Brick Top Hill goes up.

Our Main Street also has a slight rise at Church Street, and the ground then starts to level off at High Street (this information from Jim Elie). I found this to be true when I rode my bike in the parade. So, being in a basin surrounded by hills and mountains, and having a dome in the middle might answer the question as to why Willimantic is protected from bad storms. I like to think that this dome is a blessing.

In Willimantic, we have Arts at the Capitol Theater, Windham Textile Museum and their many events, Connecticut Eastern Railroad Museum and their many events, the Jillson House Museum and their events, the Veteran's Memorial Greenway and the Bike Path. Willimantic also has the Bridge of Flowers, and the Thread City Frog Bridge, the Windham Area Arts Collaboration, and many, many talented artists who have their artwork shown on Main Street, including students who have decorated the Main Street poles with their art.

Among the artists is Ann Wandell, whose work shows how much she loves Willimantic because it is of Willimantic and its beautiful buildings. Bobby Brown, one of my cousins, is also an excellent artist in Willimantic, as well as many others that I do not know.

We have Arnold Prince artwork on the Walnut Street Wall of the Lumber Company building and his wife, and Claudia's work at Eastern. There is the Swift Waters Artisan's Coop, the Art's in Motion, and Jonathan Leonard's Swift Waters karate and the River Gym.

The Akus Gallery at Eastern Connecticut State University is open to the public, as are the many Musicals at Schaffer Auditorium and Theater. Eastern also has many fine people who give talks at the ECSU library, Johnson Room.

For Walking Tours, we have the Victorian Homes, the Railroad Museum, the Old Willimantic Cemetery with its' many beautiful monuments, and the Windham Mills.

Willimantic Whitewater Partnership, Inc. is going to have a beautiful site on Bridge Street which is to be a landscaped park overlooking the Willimantic River near the falls. The Willimantic River has much to share and enjoy - parks, trails, fishing, canoes, kayaks and historical sites to see along the river front. The Willimantic River Alliance promoted the Willimantic River Greenway, which is twenty-five miles from Stafford Springs to Willimantic, to have recreational, historical, and natural resources along the river.

Willimantic is also famous for our July 4th Boom Box Parade where everyone can show off their artistic endeavors, and Romantic Willimantic crowning of a Cupid on Valentine's Day. We have Third Thursdays with many musical bands and people showing their artwork, foods and wares from many nationalities. There is the Three Kings Day Festival, annual Latin Fest, the Spanish get-together in the parcel during the summer, and the Latinos parade. There is the Julia de Burgos Poetry in the Park, the Windham Area Poetry, the Antique Show, the Train Show, Sidewalk Chalk Festival, and the Chocolate Fest. We have Founder's Day, Frog Fest, the Christmas Tree lighting and the huge Halloween Night on Main Street. Last, but not least, Willimantic has the beautiful flowers that the Garden Club decorates our town with, and the delightful large painted frogs that dot Main Street here and there in various areas.

WILLIMANTIC GENERAL

The early African Americans in Willimantic were Mr. Jackson on Jackson Street, the Watsons, Harrises, Ernie Moores, the Johnsons, the Laceys, and the Hatchers. [you wrote down here: "Look up early books."] The later African Americans in Willimantic, at around 1958 to 1960, and arriving from Mississippi were the Mackeys, the Mitchells, the Yales, the Oates, and the Wilsons.

On retiring, Murdoch was given a luncheon a plaque of twenty years of service to the community. His children were Vernon, Carl, Bailor, and Roderiel. He was a lab assistant in Paleontology for 6 years at WC Cult, and then he became a photographer.

When you see death, you value life. After thirty six years of working in forensic sciences, Carl Murdoch is ready to retire, go fishing, and spend time with his family, including his grandchildren who he'd like to spend time with. Murdoch spent seventeen years as

laboratory assistant at WC Mtt and nineteen with the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences in Montgomery. Even though he forgot the thousands of inanfigl, he participates. He couldn't forget the one he didn't participant in it, because it was in Connecticut. He and his wife saw a "hit and run" Vietnam- a young find unidentified.

From the very earliest times, people who lived in Willimantic loved their beer. I read somewhere that when the first ships came to America from England, that they had barrels of beer aboard instead of water. The English can't blame the Irish for drinking beer because the English loved their pubs.

Down Sodom had two taverns, Busters and Leonards. Union Street had the Brass Rail, Lindy's, Horseshoe Tavern, and the Checker Grill. Main Street had Ben's Place, Driscoll's, Italian Garden, Cozy Corner, Iron Horse, and the Shell Chateau. Frontanac's (Whistles) was on Railroad Street. The Park Central Hotel was on Valley Street, and the Hotel Hooker and Nathan Hale Hotel on Main Street had their barrooms. Frenchy's and Duke's and Wonder Bar barrooms were on Jackson Street, as well as the American Legion.

There were clubs in town with their barrooms: The Moose, Elks, the Polish Club, the French Club, the Italian Club, and of course the Country Club with their barroom. The American Legion Club on Jackson Street was a place for families to go after mass because it was near both churches, was a family affair, and many of the children's birthday parties were held there, as well as weddings and other occasions. People also went to Lindy's after church where they had a Green Room for parties, weddings etc.

The VFW has been on their spot for many, many years and has hosted many parties, weddings, dances, and many political gatherings with the previous Governor showing up. The motor cycle riders who ride for aiding sick children gather at the VFW.

The Moose Club on Brook Street was also there for weddings, birthday parties and for a special Thanksgiving dinner one year. Now, in their new location, they host special events for Special Class Citizens.

I can't leave out the Ukie Club. We had many wedding parties there, and gatherings for after funerals. One year, I was asked to work there as a waitress for a frat party from Uconn, and believe me, I had to stay in the kitchen all night because these young men were wild. I was the same age as the young men were because one of them went to grammar school with me. The older lady had to serve them, and even she had a problem. By now, UConn has its' own place.

Without some of these places, Willimantic people would not have a place for parties, weddings, dances, and holidays feasts. We went to many a wedding at the Shell Chateau. One year, Ben Blue's Orchestra played at the Shell Chateau. One year we had our Windham High School dance at the Shell Chateau. We had weddings at the French Club on Temple Street. One was for my cousin Helen McSheas, and we had my mother's seventy-fifth birthday party there also. I remember going to a baby shower at the French Club when it was on Church Street. Every week, we had dances at the Polish Club for everyone, and we had some wonderful Polish bands that played there. Also, the Windham Theater Guild had plays in which Willimantic people were the actors and they had dinner and a show many, many times at the Polish Club. Families had parties there for their children. One year my little nephew Timmy's birthday party was there.

Some of the Windham High School Reunions were held at the Elks Club and some were at the Country Club. The American Thread Company always had their parties at the Country Club. Political parties had their dinners at the Country Club also.

Without these places, there would not be any large gathering places for people to meet and enjoy each other's company.