

1929

Unravelling a Family Mystery

by

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“The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broke places.”

- Ernest Hemingway

“This is incredible!” - Carol Sullivan

Third prize winner of the
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(OGS)

(abridged version submitted as STIGMA)

In memory

Florence “Flora” Maud Gallson (Peters)

The Three Musketeers

Available for purchase on Lulu Publishing.

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GENEALOGY

PETERS

Joseph & Hannah

Florence "Flora"

Joseph

Ellen

Edith

Philip

Albert

Phyllis (fa. unk)

Brenda (adopted)

The Three Musketeers

- Jeannette "Jean"

- Joan

- Phillip

Paul, Suzan, Shelly

ÕUNPUU

Mikhel & Leen

John Gallson

Half-siblings

Eduard (x2)

August (x2)

Juuli

Juulius

Kaarl

Aliise

- James "Jimmy"

- Barbara "Babbs"

- Hilda

- Mae "Maisie"

- Elizabeth "Betty"

MORRISON

John & Louisa

Mary

John

Donald (fa. unk)

James

John "Jackie" (fa. unk)

Neil (m. Gladys)

Sarah

Introduction

As a child, during hot summer car trips, I'd squint at passing dilapidated century houses and I envisioned long dead families sitting outside holding glasses of lemonade and snapping green beans into bowls. Their children were shrieking with joy as they played tag around them. I had a vivid imagination.

One of these abandoned houses was a favourite holey place for my brother and me to explore. And I do mean holey, not holy. It was like walking into a thriller movie, stepping gently up the old creaky stairs Mom always predicted would collapse under our feet, plummeting us into the dirt cellar. Then, standing in the middle of the upstairs bedroom, listening to the wind whistling through the broken windows, I could feel the whispers of my long dead Great-Aunt Liza and the cousins I never knew. The 1900s Eaton's catalogue, once wet from the rain that dripped from the roof, now dried and crinkled between my fingers as I turned the pages. The rusty springs of someone's old bed frame, squawked and squeaked as I sat down to look in wonderment at the stereoscope cards strewn about the room. All these things turned the feelings and whispers into tangible images in my mind.

My interest in my family's history intensified when my father died in March 1988. When I pulled out a box of memorabilia I had accumulated from my aunties, I felt close to him. When I read about his past, I became so absorbed that when I closed the box, the feeling of having a great visit with him for hours was followed by renewed grief and emptiness. It was an emotional tradeoff that thankfully turned into more of a "see you later" as I returned to the box over and over again.

My research into my father's ancestors is a chapter I have yet to finish writing. In the meantime, this book is the story of my search for my mother's mother. I refer to her as GG, short for Gramma Gallson. This light one-person research project evolved into an obsession into the lives of three people: my grandmother, Florence Peters; my grandfather, John Gallson; and my step-grandmother, Mary Morrison.

Stigma, now merely a social discomfort, historically determined whether you kept your children, your livelihood or your dignity. Sometimes you lost all three. People learned quickly that stigmas needed to be kept hidden.

My mother and her two siblings, who became known by their offspring as The Three Musketeers, always defended their father's monumental choice of 1929.

Johannes Õunpuu

The grandfather I knew — John Gallson — was a lumberjack, a WWI hero, but inside of him was another man. Johannes Õunpuu, an Estonian with Finnish ancestors, who stowed away on a ship bound for Canada when he was a teenager. A survival-driven man, a mindset that worked before and during the war. All he had to do was duck, decide quickly, and hide when necessary. When I think of my grandfather, the Finnish word *sisu* comes to mind. It means “stoic determination, tenacity of purpose, grit, and resilience in the face of extreme adversity... an inner strength and courage to persevere even when all perceived limits have been reached”. But sometimes the blow comes unexpectedly from behind, out of nowhere.

The tale passed down to us about our grandfather was, as a teenager, he stowed away on a British freighter and made his way to Canada. This, I discovered, was only close to being true. There was no stowing away unless this meant not telling your family and likely not informing the Russian government.

My own memories of Grampa are very sparse. He smoked a pipe and he said god-damn a lot in his broken English. Everything was god-damn-this and god-damn-that, but he said it like it was just a part of the sentence. “I went to the god-damn store and bought some god-damn butter... I milked the god-damn cow and had some god-damn supper...”

Mom remembered having a dog when she was a child and they weren’t allowed to feed the dog at the table, but Grampa would sneak food off his plate to a waiting mouth under his dinner plate saying, “Take that, god-damn-ya!”

Knowing some history of his native country and my grandfather’s backstory is important in forming the full picture of him, why he thought the way he did, what motivated him and in the end, what pushed him into suspicion and silence.

Saarmaa, Estonia 1896

Johannes Õunpuu, his birth name, was born in Mustjala County, Saaremaa, Estonia, an isolated island facing the Baltic Sea. According to the official Estonian registry, Grampa's birthdate is November 25, 1896. However, he consistently reported his birthday to be November 13. In February 1918, after he'd left Estonia, the country adopted the Gregorian calendar and 13 days were added to all prior birthdates to make up for an 11-minute per year drift from the Julian calendar. This was the first clue to Grampa's rebellious nature against the establishment and the government.

In 1896, Estonia was still a territory of Imperial Russia. Czar Nicholas II had just become the emperor after the death of his father Alexander III in May of that year. There was tension between the wealthy German minority and nobility who "hindered the russification of the country and Estonia continued to serve as an outpost of Western culture." This is a quote from a booklet sent to me by Kaido, my Estonian cousin. I was surprised to learn that Estonians are not ethnically or linguistically related to Russians, Germans, Latvians or Lithuanians, all of whom are Slavic, Germanic and Baltic origin. Estonians are closely related to Nordic peoples, especially the Finns and they are descendants of Vikings.

Mom told us to never say Grampa was from Russia or was Russian. That was a firm rule. She was also told from a very young age that she was closely related to Finlanders.

One of the most intriguing things about the DNA testing company, 23andMe was their matching to historical archeological digs around the world. So when the remains of ancient Viking burial sites matched my DNA, I didn't even have to question that it came from my maternal grandfather's line.

Grampa was a typical, well educated Estonian where elementary school was free and compulsory. While Russia's illiteracy rate was over 70 percent, Estonia's was under four percent. During the 1940s and 1950s, Grampa wrote many letters to his siblings, which I had translated into English. My translator, Ellen, was impressed with Grampa's writing and said she could tell he was well educated. My mother thought the letters would likely have been

written in secret, because in her memory, her step-mother forbade him from speaking or communicating in Estonian. But he found a way to get around that.

At the time Grampa left his homeland, Estonia and half of Latvia were sometimes called Lifland or Luuimaa in Estonian. In one of Grampa's military documents, he claims his birthplace as Arensberg, Lifland, which was previously Kuressaare until the Russian occupation.

Estonian peasants got their surnames between 1822-1835. In fact, the 1826 Estonian census is the first one where peasants are listed with surnames. They were previously known by the farms they lived on. Also because Estonian documents were often written by Germans or Russians, the surname Õunpuu was misspelled as Ounpu or Aunpuu or Aunpu because in the Russian or German language, there's no letter for Õ.

It seemed next to impossible to not only locate the Estonian documents I needed, but then I couldn't read them. Luckily, I connected with a relative, Maale Jaagola, in Estonia who went to the archives at the University of Tartu, retrieved documents, translated them and mailed them to me. Maale only asked that I reimburse him for his costs.

Grampa was the oldest of nine children of Mihkel Õunpuu and Leen Toompuu, yet he outlived all but one. Two of the children died as babies which was sadly common at the time. So Grampa had two brothers named August and two brothers named Eduard.

When Grampa left Estonia at the age of 16, he left behind two sisters, Aliise age 2, Juuli age 8, and two brothers Juulius age 9 and Kaarl age 12. My grandfather had pictures of Juuli, Juulius and Kaarl with their birth and death years on them. All in all, Leen Toompuu had lived through the deaths of four children, before dying in 1932.

On Saaremaa Island, surnames were assigned or chosen from a list of items including natural elements. My ancestors chose the apple tree, õun (apple) and puu (tree). Ellen, an Estonian, told me over tea one day that my great-grandmother's surname, Toompuu, is a juniper tree.

In a 1988 letter from Kaido, my Estonian cousin, he says Grampa "lived a short time in Tallinn and then escaped on board a ship to England." It is interesting that Kaido referred to Grampa's departure as an escape likely in reference to escaping Russian oppression.

Bound for Canada 1913

Documents show that in 1913, before the Russian revolution, Johannes Õunpuu, was recruited by Aleksander Matt, a fellow Estonian born in Arensburg, who at the age of 19 had already made several ocean crossings, always with a different group. On June 13, the S.S. Columbia made its way from Finland to Glasgow, carrying Estonians, Finns and Russians whose destination was “CPR, Chapleau, Ontario”, Canada. On June 16 the ship arrived at Ellis Island, New York. The ship’s manifest states Grampa was able to read and write English. There was no column for “speak English”. He had \$25 and his destination was a “friend”, Johannes Lonn, in Chapleau.

Canadian Pacific Railways hired contractors who hired lumberjacks to cut logs and make railroad ties. Even though Grampa didn’t work for the CPR directly, he still would have an obligation to the contractor, who fronted Grampa the money for the journey from Estonia to Canada.

He would have found the winters in Chapleau much harsher than in Estonia. The Finns who were recruited would not have felt much change in the seasons compared to home. To this day, there are a lot of people of Finnish descent living in Northern Ontario, especially in Timmins and Schumacher. Once Grampa worked off his debt, he moved south to Sault Ste. Marie area.

Sometime before 1916, Grampa changed his name from Johannes Õunpuu to John Edward Gaalson, which morphed over the years to Gaallson, then Gallson. There is no Estonian word “Gaalson” or “Gaal”. Also, in the Estonian birth registry, there’s no indication that Grampa had a second name, and if he did, it wouldn’t have been Edward. John’s youngest brother was Eduard. According to the Vital Statistics from Tallinn, none of the Õunpuu family had second names.

Kaarl and Juuli Õunpuu





Aliise Õunpuu and son, Matti



Aliise Õunpuu



Eduard Õunpuu



Eduard Õunpuu with family



Juulius Õunpuu



Eduard Õunpuu



August Õunpuu

World War I

In 1916, Grampa made his way to Webbwood, Ontario where he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Army on March 10. On August 8, he began to send \$15 per month back to his father, Mihkel, in Estonia. He reported his trade as “Lumberjack”, not CPR worker. He weighed 155 pounds. He disembarked the S. S. Metagama in Liverpool, the same ship on which my grandmother boarded four years later. On August 19, he went through a battery of Anti-Typhoid inoculations, but was diagnosed with mumps and parotitis on October 2. By October 25, he was misdiagnosed with Rubella which ended up being gonorrhea. The next day, he bequeathed all his estate to a Miss Gladys Hall.

Between August 19, 1916 and December, 1918 Grampa had mumps, three rounds of gonorrhea, syphilis and a shrapnel wound in the head. He fought at Vimy Ridge, France and in the Battle of Passchendaele in Ypres, Belgium. Battling venereal diseases came with painful shots of arsenic, mercury and galy. Three times he was discharged from the British hospital as “cured” of syphilis. His medical logs read as if the army just got fed up with him and sent him home on the S. S. Olympic back to Canada.

On the ship’s manifest, Grampa’s “rank” was sapper. My brother Wayne emailed me in November 2021:

I watched a movie once where the sappers were pushing bombs under the barbed wire with long poles attached to them with a string to fire it. Once they got the bomb under the barbed wire, they would pull the string and hope they blew up the barbed wire and not themselves. Sometimes the string would get hung up on something as they pushed it in and the bomb would go off and blow them up.

Because he was Scandinavian and didn’t speak English well, a doctor at the hospital wrote that he mistakenly thought Grampa was mentally slow.

In the early 1900s, there was virtually only one cure for syphilis. A relatively new discovery known as the “606 Compound” or Salvarsan but throughout Grampa’s detailed medical logs, there is no mention of him being treated with this. Civilian treatments for syphilis could cost between \$300 and \$1,000, which was out of reach for many patients. Some hospitals refused

to admit patients with syphilis because there was such stigma surrounding it, and funding for public clinics was cut. Penicillin was not used for venereal diseases until the mid 1940s.

Without being treated with Salvarsan, Grampa was not yet cured, but there was another golden opportunity for Grampa to at least seek the current treatment for free.

Toronto had a hospital specifically for WWI soldiers returning with syphilis, the Military Base Hospital on Gerrard Street, the former Toronto General Hospital. If Grampa was forced into this hospital upon his return to Canada, perhaps it was here that Salvarsan would have been used.

I ordered the admission documents from between the time he arrived back in Toronto to when he left Canada for the United States. I wanted to find his name so badly amongst the hundreds of soldiers who came back with syphilis and gonorrhea that I checked three times through the 15 multipage documents. It was with disappointment that I had to admit that Grampa never took advantage of this. And truly, it made complete sense to me that if he was released three times from the British hospital as cured, why would he think otherwise.

It was interesting going through the hundreds of names, many treated for influenza but mostly for venereal disease. They were discharged either “to duty” or as “invalids” perhaps testifying to the success rate of Salvarsan.

He was 22 years old, 5’ 9”, blue eyes - a good looking “Lumberman” with his regimental number tattooed on his right forearm. His bad English, head wound and perhaps an unwillingness to talk about it, is the likely reason why his obituary merely says he was wounded at Passchendaele with no mention of Vimy Ridge. His granddaughter, Deb Ranger, shared a memory about touching Grampa’s tattoo and asking about it. His response was to pull his sleeve down and say “Never mind.”

Grampa received the British War Medal and Victory Medal. These medals were donated to the Royal Canadian Legion 254 in Mattawa, Ontario where Grampa was a charter member. If they made it there, they never made it to the wall of honour - perhaps still sitting in a drawer somewhere.

John Gallson ca. 1916





John Gallson ca. 1919



John Gallson ca 1919

United States of America 1920

On December 16, 1920, Grampa headed for Wheeling, West Virginia where he joined the US Army as a Private and declared he was born in Finland, he'd **never** had gonorrhea, **never** been treated by a doctor and **never** been in the hospital, **never** saw action. There is not one indication on his US Army documentation that he'd served with the Canadian Expeditionary Forces in France and Belgium. They did notice "119" tattooed on his arm so it's puzzling why there's no mention of his Canadian service in WWI. They gave him \$90 for signing up for three years.

The pictures of Grampa in uniform were thought to be his WWI pictures until my sister stumbled across a 52nd Battalion website in 2010 managed by Lt. Tal Fisher in Thunder Bay. On a mission to have Grampa's name included in the website's database, she emailed Lt. Fisher all the pictures of Grampa. His response was surprising. The uniforms Grampa was wearing in the pictures were NOT Canadian, but American.

He pointed out that the diamond patch on a sleeve indicated he was in the 5th Division, the low chevrons indicated he had served overseas for two and a half years and the high chevrons were that of a Corporal.

Grampa was never deployed while in the US Army, he was not in the 5th Division, not a corporal, and was only in the US army for 9 months. So it seems Grampa had all his US army photos taken using borrowed uniforms with bonus badges, ribbons and medals. He was awarded only two medals: British War Medal and the British Victory Medal. The cross medal on the uniform looks like a US Marine marksmanship medal but he was never in the Marines and beside "marksmanship skill" on his American Enlistment document, it says "none".

In August 2025, during a visit with Aunt Barb, Mom's half sister, I finally found a picture of Grampa in his Canadian uniform. He was nineteen years old when he enlisted but he looks like a boy. Yet, in the US army fatigues, taken only four years later after his return from service in France and Belgium, he looks like a man.

According to another half sister of my mother, Aunt Hilda, Grampa may also have been stationed at the Louisville Military Base, Indiana. Uncle Phill wrote to the U.S. Army, asking for Grampa's records. The reply said that due to a fire, all those records had been destroyed. It wasn't until January 10, 2023 that the National Personnel Records Center wrote to tell me that only the personnel records from Hubbard - Z were completely destroyed in a fire and they were able to reconstruct Grampa's records using "alternative record sources."

On the same day he registered for the US army in Wheeling, West Virginia, Grampa began the process of becoming an American citizen by initiating a two-step process taking a minimum of five years and a maximum of seven years to obtain his U.S. Naturalization. After living in the United States for two years, Grampa could file a *Declaration of Intention* to become a citizen. He reports his birth date as November 13, 1896, that he was born in Arensburg, Finland, Russia, and that he had a scar on his nose. What happened to the shrapnel wound scar on his head! But then again, he did claim to have never been in the hospital. After three additional years, he could *petition for naturalization* after which a certificate would be issued.

While in Wheeling, he indicated that a Mrs. Nora Tucker of Mystic, Irwin, Georgia was his emergency contact. The 1920 Irwin County census shows Nora Tucker was a 22 year old widow living with her father and siblings on a farm. Fourteen months later, Grampa married Miss Florence Peters (GG) in Manhattan.

Even though he was enlisted in the American Army, he had to keep the Canadian Army apprised as to his whereabouts. One of those "change of address" documents, dated November 1921, puts Grampa at 165 East 128th St., New York City. In 1920, this address was rented by a Finnish widow by the name of Sophia Altonen, who rented out rooms to three Finnish male boarders. This building was a mere 30-minute street car trip or horse and buggy ride through Central Park to the Hotel Lorraine where GG worked and lived. At the time of his marriage, Grandpa's address was R. F. D. #1 (Rural Fire Department route #1), Paterson, NJ.

Being in New York City anytime between 1920 to 1933, was likely a very exciting time. The city was under prohibition resulting in the city experiencing a thriving underground alcohol

trade, with numerous speakeasies. A few of the most popular ones were along the streets where Grampa and GG would have walked.

Five years had passed since Grampa was initially infected with syphilis. In this latent stage, single instances of transmission are rare but GG contracting syphilis was still a possibility.

Dr. M. Geoffrey Miller in his book *Syphilis Treatment During WWI*, described an incident where, in 1986, he diagnosed a woman with tertiary syphilis that she had contracted from her husband after he returned from WWI, sixty-seven years prior.

By January 1923, Grampa and GG were in Waterville, Maine where Jeannette Ellen was born and remained there until at least April 15, 1923 when Aunt Jean was baptized.

In November 1924, the U.S. Department of Labor (Bureau of Naturalization) wrote to Grampa confirming the receipt of his application and of his intention and requested \$1.00, which Grampa sent with an undated note and a return address of Zolfo Springs, Florida.

Mom was born just down the highway from Zolfo Springs in Wauchula, Florida, January 1925. As mentioned earlier, Mom's birth registration had mysterious mistakes. GG's name was wrong, recorded as "Fannie". GG had to get an affidavit signed by the doctor correcting the spelling of Grampa's birth country and her name to Flora (not Florence). Grampa was likely the person who gave the information. Was this the first indication that something was not right with Grampa's memory?

Phillip John was born in March 1926 in Zolfo Springs. While still there, Grampa received a letter dated April 6, 1927, confirming the receipt of the \$1.00 fee and warning Grampa that his petition of naturalization would expire on December 16, 1927, exactly seven years after he originally applied.

A series of pictures shows Aunt Jean and my mother in front of an older vehicle. Mom looks to be about two, dating the picture to around 1927 in Florida.

My mother wrote on one of the pictures that it's 1930 in Florida. However, if the picture was taken in Florida, it would be 1928 or before because in 1928, they had moved to Endicott, NY. Aunt Jean looks to be about five, Uncle Phill about two and Mom about three.

I believe all these pictures were taken at the same time and that the picture-taking session may have been instigated by Grampa's shiny new Model-T. The children are wearing the same clothes in all the pictures and may have been taken on their trip from Florida to New York state.

In 1928, John Gallson is listed in the city directory at 200 North Street, Endicott, as a tanner and in 1929 at 206 North Street as a "shwkr" (shoeworker). I found North Street on a 1918 city map and looked around the address to see what was within walking distance. The Endicott-Johnson Tannery and Shoe Factory, one of the biggest shoe factories in the world at that time, was only a few blocks away. This company provided medical care and tremendous, innovative, benefits for its employees including company shares and subsidized housing.

I wrote to Syracuse University which has a huge E-J Tannery archive. Unfortunately, the personnel documents are from 1931 and forward, after the Gallsons left Endicott for Canada.

Peter Serko writes on his website (<https://peterserko.com/endicott-johnson-shoe-company/>):

The scope of benefits EJ offered their employees and the community was staggering. I'm sure I'm missing a few: two hospitals, a golf course, amusement parks complete with carousels, a racetrack, several pools, medical centers (free to employees and their families), a food market, bowling alleys, and recreation centers.

All of Grampa's Naturalization documents seem to be available online and there's nothing that indicates he was denied. So why did he give it all up: U.S. citizenship and the dream job?

John Gallson ca 1919





John Gallson ca 1919



WW1 Canadian CEF Three Year
Service Veterans Lapel Pin Badge
(Bottom portion of pin
unidentified)

Trout Mills, Ontario 1929

On May 23, 1929, Grampa and GG bought a parcel of land in Trout Mills, Widdifield Township, Ontario for \$140. Parcel number 1279 was the east half of the northwest quarter of Lot 15, Concession B. The purchase was from Hugh Dignam, an electrical engineer and WWI lieutenant from Toronto. After a search through Lt. Dignam's army records, I could find no connection to Grampa. So how Grampa found the property is still a mystery.

The fatal choice was made – leave a massively successful company with health care and shareholding employees in Endicott, NY, abandon his US Naturalization application and move to a rural Ontario farm.

The driving time in a Model-T Ford from Endicott to Trout Mills at 65-70 km per hour (40-45 mph), would have been about eight hours not including the stop at the border and the children's potty breaks. The Gallsons left Endicott and crossed the US-Canada border on July 6, 1929.

Three months later, the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began when the value of goods dropped especially in sectors such as farming, mining and logging according to an article on canada.ca website. There couldn't have been a worse time for Grampa to decide to make a living as a farmer and lumberjack.

The 1931 Widdifield census confirms Grampa was the “owner” of the farm when its value had risen to \$300.

Mom remembered living in that little house in Trout Mills. After it rained, there was flooding in the cellar, water that she could see through the holes in the floor. The children would drop little pieces of wood into the holes and watch them float and make a game of bombarding each other's “ships”.

My brother's memories of Grampa are almost as sparse as mine. Grampa sitting in a rocking chair and growing his own tobacco which he hung to dry in his kitchen. He owned one cow and some chickens. Grampa also showed Wayne his Passchendaele shrapnel scar on the left side of his head. He worked as a tree-faller in the bush.

Any other contact or communication with Grampa was in passing. A few years before his death, around 1977, Aunt Jean went to visit him in a rooming house in Mattawa where he was living alone and was appalled by his living conditions. She moved him to her home in North Bay to live out the rest of his life.

Grampa told Aunt Jean that GG had two married sisters in England. She did have two sisters but they never married and she also had two brothers. Grampa also stated that Aunt Jean's daughter's red hair was like GG's, but GG's hair was brown. If these accounts are true, Grampa had either lost memories or he really knew very little about GG, not even her true name or birthdate.

On December 21, 1929, GG disappeared. Grampa wrote to his sister in Estonia, telling her that his wife "went mad."

Florence Peters

When I was very young, Mom told me that my Gramma Gallson — GG — died in 1929 when my mother was five years old. GG's picture, with a Mona Lisa smile, sat in a gold frame on my mother's dresser beside my grandfather's army portrait. I'd sit on the edge of my parents bed and stare at it. If I squinted, her lips would move and whisper. But as much as I would strain my ears, I could never make out what she was saying.

My grandmother's name could have been Maud Flora. Or maybe Flora Maud. My mother wasn't completely certain which seemed odd to me. After all, I knew my parents' full names AND my grandparents' names. I knew birthdays and anniversaries. It was bewildering.

I was haunted by GG's story or more precisely, the lack of a story. It bugged me, nudged me, poked me, randomly popped in and out of my mind throughout my life.

When I reached my teenage years, Mom acquiesced to my endless questions. She reluctantly added that a letter delivered accidentally to my uncle in the late 1940s exposed that GG did not die in 1929 when she disappeared from my mother's life.

The tale that my research unfolded over the years was heartbreaking and more intriguing than I could have imagined.

London, England 1897

When I began researching GG's story, I was looking for either Maud Flora Peters or Flora Maud Peters. My mother was certain her mother's name was one or the other. My sister's second name is Flora. Aunt Jean's marriage registration records GG's name as Maud F. Peters. An affidavit was filed on September 19, 1925, correcting GG's name from "Fannie" to Flora on my mother's birth registration. So that's the name I set out to find.

The only other pieces of information I had were some crumbs of my mother's memories: napkins holders on the table, getting packages and mailing letters to an Aunt Edie on Wembley Street in London, secretly discovering an old photo album and quickly grabbing a handful of toddler photos, one portrait photo of her mother and one with "Edie in her garden" written on the back. That's it.

In the summer of 1986, I found the only birth registration in Kensington, London, that came close to being GG's: November 21, 1897, Florence Maud, born to James Henry Peters, carman G.W.R. and Hannah Peters, formerly Smith, 3 Martin Street. It would take years before I discovered the registrar's error in her father's name which sent me on a long fruitless back and forth with the General Register Office in London.

It came as a complete surprise that my grandmother's true name was Florence and that my great-grandmother's maiden name was Smith, unrelated to my paternal lineage.

As the years went by, through LDS family history centres and the Ontario Archives, then online through Ancestry and FamilySearch, GG's life began to emerge. I can't remember exactly when I found the Manhattan marriage record for my grandparents, but it was a revelation. It included my great-grandfather's true name, Joseph Peters.

It wouldn't be until 2001, nine years later, that I would be able to see the 1901 census to find the full list of everyone who was living at 3 Martin Street, London, England.

Joseph H. Peters, Head, 36, Railway carman
 Hannah Peters, Wife, 32
 Ellen Peters, Daughter, 7
 Joseph Peters, Son, 5
 Florence Peters, Daughter, 3

George Smith, Brother-in-law, 24, Railway carman
Rose Smith, Sister-in-law, 20, Laundry calendar hand wash

Not only did this confirm GG's father's first name, but also she had a brother, Joseph and a sister Ellen, indicating the source of Aunt Jean's second name. This also divulged Hannah's two siblings, George Smith and Rose Smith. But where was "Edie"?

GG's birth registration revealed that her father worked for GWR, which was the Great Western Railroad in London. These records are on Ancestry and they open a little window into the Peters' family life.

In 1878 at the age of 13, Joseph started out as a Van Guard. By the time he reached the age of 23, he was a driver and began to get into trouble for "leaving van route" and careless driving. In 1894, he was written up for smoking in the van. In 1901, he was "strongly cautioned" for "swinging his whip in Holborn, resulting in a claim for personal injury" and in 1903 was on Workmen's Compensation for six months which coincided with the next major surprise in his life - the birth of twins, Edith and Philip.

And there she was - Edie!

Edith Louisa and Philip James were born January 4, 1903, which likely made my mother's birthdate of January 4, 1925 quite significant to GG.

In February 1910, Joseph's work records report that he resigned. Later that year, he died from cancer of the tonsils and liver and exhaustion. Tonsil cancer is caused by tobacco and alcohol use. He was only 46, having put in 33 years at the Great Western Railroad. GG was twelve years old at the time.

By 1911, the fatherless family had moved from Kensington to Harlesden. Edith is now included in the census as well as the youngest brother, Albert William. Rose, Hannah's sister, is still living with them. But where was Philip? And why Harlesden?

Hannah Peters, Head, 41, Widow
Joseph Peters, Son, 15
Ellen Peters, Daughter, 17, Single
Florence Peters, Daughter, 13
Edith Peters, Daughter, 8

Albert Peters, Son, 6
Rose Smith, Sister, 30, Single

A relative I found on Facebook in London (more about her later), said according to the family stories, Philip Peters was born “sickly” and died. I ordered his death registration which confirmed that on March 9, 1907, at the age of four, he died of acute capillary bronchitis, pulmonary congestion.

Harlesden was a community of G.W.R. workers and their families. Once GG’s father died, Hannah moved to an area of like minded people who supported widows of the Great West. Talk and conversation, in and out of the home, would have been railroad themed. A very interesting fact was that the wood for the railroad ties that the G.W.R. used were sourced out of Estonia! GG grew up with her father talking about railroads.

The Peters’ family dynamic likely played a major role in shaping and motivating GG’s decision to leave London behind, get on a ship and sail to Canada. She grew up with strong female role models in her sisters Ellen and Edith, as well as her Aunt Rose, none of whom ever married. Her mother lived as a single parent of five children. They all worked full time, hopefully contributing and supporting the household. Also this perhaps brought out a determination in GG that she would not live her life as a spinster like her sisters and aunt. And because eligible men were in short supply in London after WWI, she needed to look elsewhere.

In 1915, GG’s brother, Joseph Peters Jr. volunteered for the army, serving in the 9th Middlesex Regiment fighting in the Dardanelles which was a bloodbath and a complete disaster according to a docuseries *Churchill At War*.

It’s possible that GG worked for Relida Ltd., a company that made Eiderdown quilts. Both Edith and Ellen worked there in 1921 as machinists and then in 1931 as Irish Embroidery machinists. Hannah was working for the Great West as an office cleaner.

By the time the 1921 UK census was taken, Joseph Jr. was married and GG had left for Canada.

Hannah Peters, Head, 51, Widow
Ellen Peters, Daughter, 27
Edith Peters, Daughter, 18

Albert Peters, Son, 16
 Phyllis Peters, Daughter, 7, Father dead
 Rose Smith, Sister, 39

“Wait wait wait!” I heard myself say. *Who is Phyllis Peters?*

Phyllis Vera Peter’s birth record registered Hannah as her mother, born January 31, 1914 with no father. Hannah reported that Phyllis’s father was dead in the census. While it's possible that Hannah bore another child at the age of 44, three years after the death of her husband Joseph, I believe this is suspicious. It's important to note that when Hannah died, she left her estate to Edith and Ellen, ***not Phyllis***, supposedly her youngest illegitimate daughter.

So who was the true mother of Phyllis? There were really only two options: Ellen, Hannah’s oldest daughter, who was 20 at the time or GG who was 17. Could this have been the answer to why GG left England because of the stigma of being an unwed mother? My mother was named Joan Vera, so it seems odd that she would name two daughters Vera, unless she never intended to reunite with Phyllis. There was no way to prove anything without connecting with descendants of Phyllis Vera Peters.

Hannah died in 1948 in Wembley, the same area from which Mom, as a child, remembered sending and receiving packages from Aunt Edie.



Florence Peters ca 1919

Edith Peters



“Edie in her garden” 1927



Edith, Ellen and Phyllis ca. 1922



Phyllis Vera Peters

I had to find any descendants of Phyllis Peters because there may be a box of memorabilia somewhere and family secrets. This led me to the Cannings in London, England. Although the census has a 100-year viewing moratorium, electoral lists are all public. I was sure that Ellen and Edith Peters would be dead ends because I didn't know who they married. But surprisingly, they continued to show up on the electoral lists, first with Hannah, then, when Hannah died, they moved in with Phyllis and her husband, Bernard Bramwell Thorpe. I found the birth of a son, Philip, to Phyllis and Bernard. But Philip disappeared from the records and another child, Brenda, began showing up in the Thorpe family. In later years, after Bernard's death, Phyllis and Edith both continued to live with Brenda and her husband David Canning. Brenda and David had 5 children: Paul, Suzan, Shelly, Andrew and Stephen.

As a recap, Phyllis Peters m. Bernard Bramwell Thorpe and their children were

- Philip Thorpe
- Brenda Thorpe who married David Canning. Their children were:
 - Paul, Suzan m. Mark Birdsall, Shelly, Andrew, Stephen

On Facebook, I found Suzan Birdsall, who had multiple Canning friends, but she didn't respond to any messages. So I then found Paul Canning and asked him to forward my request to his sister.

Within a few days, Suzan and I connected. She actually had a box of her "Gran's" pictures and things. She sent me pictures of Phyllis, who, at first glance, I thought was Aunt Jean. She told me that Phyllis's son Philip was a "sickly" baby and died not long after birth. Phyllis and Bernard then adopted Brenda. So Suzan fully disclosed that she and her siblings were not blood related to the Thorpes or the Peters. But then she also disclosed that Aunt Edie made a deathbed confession—that Brenda was "true family and not an outsider". This was interpreted by the Cannings to mean that Brenda was actually the biological child of Edith and it became "an open secret that Edith was my mum's mum", Suzan wrote.

It made perfect sense to me that if Brenda was Edith's illegitimate child, Phyllis would adopt her. I admit, I wanted to believe this was true as it seemed like a family code was being

honoured, since Hannah had adopted and raised Phyllis, either Ellen's or GG's illegitimate child, as her own.

Suzan indicated that she thought her sister Shelly may have more memorabilia. One message later, Shelly let me know that she had Aunt Edie's scrapbook which contained a sketch Shelly described as being drawn by Aunt Edie. I stared at the picture in true disbelief and wonder. It was a sketch of a full portrait of GG, the same picture that was cropped and sitting on my mother's dresser. I have no doubt it was drawn by GG as she drew earrings that are not discernible in the photograph. Written on the drawing is "USA 1921" which created a mystery but perhaps was a clue into the timing of GG's crossing into the USA before her marriage.

Shelly then found the original full portrait. GG's hands were exactly like Mom's. It's signed "Your's, [sic] Loving Daughter".

Shelly promised to go through the scrapbook, but she was busy. Months later, I reached out to her again, receiving a response that their father had died over Christmas and the family was in mourning and Suzan was in the hospital.

I expressed condolences and waited, again. Then an announcement on Facebook made my heart sink - Suzan had died. I expressed condolences and waited again. Then another announcement on Facebook that Suzan's husband, Mark committed suicide. The memorabilia box was getting further and further out of reach.

Paul took possession of Phyllis's box from Suzan's belongings which he said contained "so many photos", he'd need a few days off work to go through them all and scan them. He sent scans of Phyllis's wedding and one of GG, age 20, likely her true passport picture.

Then Paul stopped communicating. When I would message him, he said things were hectic, there were family problems, he didn't have time working 10-hour days and his computer had blown up.

In the summer of 2024, I offered to pay for Shelly's DNA to be tested through Ancestry. After some cajoling, she agreed and it showed she had no DNA connection to me. This proved that Shelly's mother Brenda Thorpe was adopted from **outside** the family and not

“real family” as the Aunt Edie deathbed confession had been interpreted. By January 2025, I badgered Shelly into pulling out Aunt Edie’s scrapbook once more and having a third look for any clues of GG. According to Shelly, all that is in the scrapbook are pictures of film and TV stars.

Jean Gallson



Phyllis Peters



It cannot be a coincidence that Aunt Jean named her first child C. Phyllis, declaring to my sister that she merely liked the name. GG must have talked about Phyllis, whether she was her daughter, niece or sister.





Drawing of Florence Peters with insert of only photo Mom had and an insert of Florence's signature to compare

Full portrait picture of Florence Peters

Bound for Canada 1920

GG boarded the S. S. Metagama bound for Canada in Liverpool on January 30, 1920 with the “Miss Taylor Party”, as a domestic. Her passage was paid for by the Overseas Settlement Committee. The ship landed in Saint John, New Brunswick on February 10, 1920. She had a ticket for the Canadian National Railway with a destination of Montreal and \$5 in her pocket. Her intention was to “take up employment” and to reside permanently in Canada.

According to the Pier 21 website, The Empire Settlement Act of 1922 offered many benefits to entice emigration out of the UK including covering the fare, financial aid and wage standards.

On the ship’s manifest, page 33a, GG was one of seven women who were part of Miss Taylor’s party.

There is nothing on the border crossing documents that indicates what GG’s cabin number was on the ship, but looking at the ship’s layout of 3rd class, GG shared a room with either three or five other women and needed to use a communal toilet and bathtub.

From a re-creation of a third-class cabin and menu from the RMS Titanic, one can see the rooms were small with bunk beds made from plywood, with one small night table, while a meal consisted of soup, pork, potatoes, biscuits and pudding.

I couldn’t help but wonder if the sinking of the Titanic, just eight years prior, might have been on GG’s mind.

The transatlantic trip took eleven days. The Titanic experienced temperatures of close to -2C and the S.S. Metagama’s 1920 crossing came very close to that at around -5C, according to the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS) Surface Temperature Analysis.

After the Titanic tragedy, ships were re-routed slightly south of “iceberg alley”. From February 4 to February 7, 1920, the S.S. Metagama’s route into New Brunswick was described in *Weather Highlights of the ‘Roaring Twenties’* as “One of New York’s most extended onslaughts of winter weather of all time brought 72 hours of snow, sleet and

freezing rain... During this punishing storm, 4.41” of liquid precipitation fell, 17.5” of it in the form of snow...; the rest was sleet and freezing rain.”

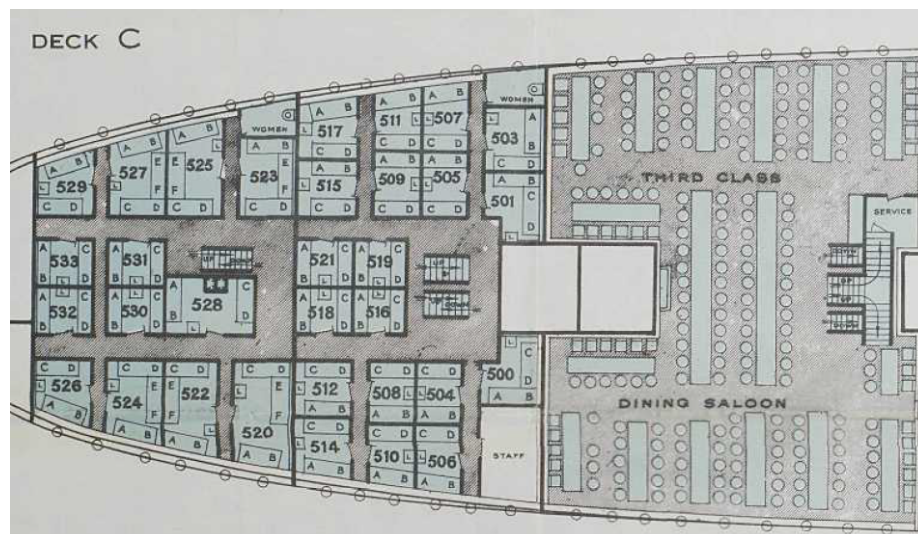
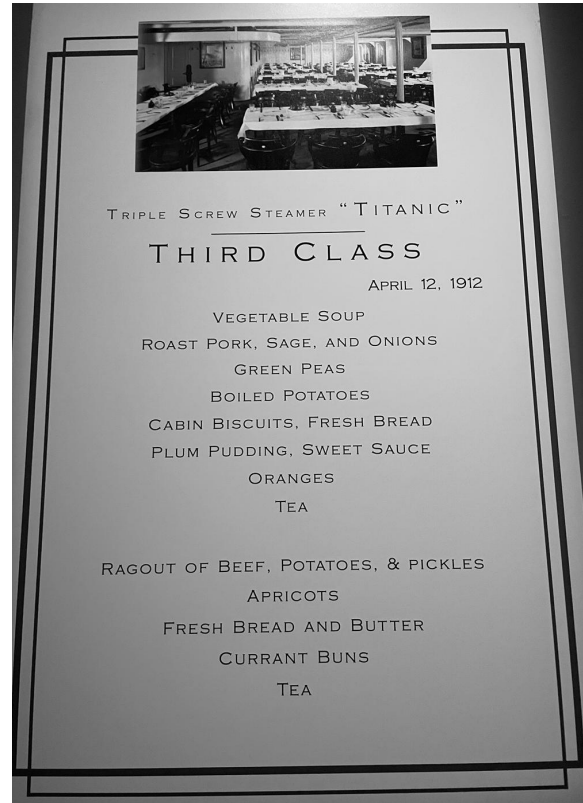
The Women's Leader, March 19, 1920 issue, described the Overseas Settlement Committee as part of an agreement between the British government and other Commonwealth countries to resettle domestics, amongst others. ⁵ The author of this particular article, Elizabeth Montizambert, tries to dispel the myth that Canada is too cold and assures women that “by the second winter they’ll be acclimatized”, and that British Columbia and Ontario have climates similar to England’s, which is odd since Ontario and BC weather aren’t even close to being the same. She also tries to dispel the *nasty* rumour that Canada didn’t have a class structure, that servants and household heads dine together – “*that’s just not the case!*” She also claimed that Canadian homes were well heated, although ladies going to the northern parts of Quebec and Ontario might want to bring warmer clothing. Might?

After arrival in Saint John, New Brunswick, accommodations were arranged in a chain of hostels. Wage expectations were as follows:

- \$18 - \$25 per month for maid of all work
- \$30 - \$40 per month for table-maids
- \$20 per month for hospital ward maids with the uniform included.

For reference, Mom worked as a live-in housekeeper in the late 1930s and early 1940s making \$25 per month.

Titanic exhibition: 3rd class charters, menu and layout



Florence Peters ca. 1920



During the next eight months, GG's whereabouts are unknown, presumably either in Montreal or Toronto. On October 25, 1920, she crossed the border to the U.S.A. through Buffalo. Her last residence was Toronto. Her destination was a "friend", Lester F. Gilbert, 115 Lexington Ave., Buffalo, NY. The building at this address is still standing, built in 1890. In the 1920 US Census, Lester Gilbert was a lawyer with a wife, three children, a maid, a cook and a nurse. GG reported on the border crossing document that she was 5' 1", brown hair and brown eyes. She had \$60.00.

One year later, on October 24, 1921, GG again, crossed the U.S. border at Bridgeburg (Fort Erie) into Canada by train. She reported her last residence being the Hotel Biltmore, 335 Madison Ave., New York City. Her objective was to "visit" a friend, Mrs. Draper, 88 Scollard St., Toronto, Ontario and stated that she "*may remain*". *Waitress* is crossed out and *Domestic* is written above it. She had \$100. That was a lot of money being worth just under \$1800 in 2025.

The 1921 Canadian Census shows a Draper family living at 88 Scollard: William, Lillian, 2 children and 2 lodgers. Lillian is an English woman, age 30. Perhaps this was where GG was living while in Toronto.

On November 15, 1921, John Gallson sent a change of address notification to the Canadian army stating he was living in New York City at 165 East 128th Street which is at the north end of High Park in Manhattan. Sometime between October 1921 and March 1922, GG made an about-turn, came back to NYC taking up employment at the Hotel Lorraine in Manhattan at the south end of High Park. This return border crossing remains elusive.

On March 7, 1922, at the Manhattan City Hall, Florence Peters married John Gallson. It is curious and puzzling that this is the last time GG is ever recorded as being Florence. Every document I found after, she is **Flora**.

It would take years, and an unrelated photograph, before I understood why.

1922 Marriage Record

10-0000-01-01, 10-01

No. of Certificate

The City of New York,
Department of Health

STATE OF NEW YORK

CERTIFICATE AND RECORD OF MARRIAGE 1922

Groom: John Gallson
Bride: Florence M. Peter

Parents of Groom: Robert Gallson, Mary Gallson
Parents of Bride: Michael Peter, Anna Peter

Place of Birth: London, England
Place of Birth: New York, New York

Age: 25
Age: 24

Color: White
Color: White

Marital Status: Single
Marital Status: Single

Signature of Groom: John Gallson
Signature of Bride: Florence M. Peter

Signature of Minister: J. W. Weitzman
Signature of Deputy City Clerk: M. S. Brodsky

I hereby certify that the above-named groom and bride were joined in Marriage by me, in accordance with the Laws of the State of New York, at the City of New York, on the 15th day of April, 1922.

WE solemnly certify that we are the Groom and Bride named in this Certificate, and that the information given therein is correct, to the best of our knowledge and belief.

John Gallson
Florence M. Peter

Signed in the presence of
J. W. Weitzman
M. S. Brodsky

Trout Mills, Ontario 1929

My grandparent's first child, Jeannette "Jean", was born in Waterville, Maine in 1923. Sometime after Aunt Jean's April 15 baptism, the Gallsons moved to Florida, likely staying in "camps" near Miami. In 1925 and 1926, my mother and Uncle Phill were born in Hardee County, Florida.

My Mom had a picture of Grampa holding Aunt Jean as a 6-month old baby. It's labelled at the top "Collinsville Ca...". I believe the indecipherable word is "Camp". Then, during a visit with Uncle Phill's daughter, Sharlene, we discovered another picture (There's ALWAYS a second photo!) of Aunt Jean alone on a blanket with the same buildings in the background, captioned by Uncle Phill, "My sister Jean, 6-months old in Florida". This was proof that the family had a camera and there likely were many photos of Aunt Jean with GG, as well as the other children as they were born.

While I could never find any reference to Collinsville Camp, Deanna Butler writes in *The First Seminole Tourist Camps* that the Seminoles of Florida developed camps throughout Florida along the Dixie Highway in an attempt to capitalize on the tourism that began to boom after WWI when families began to “vacation” and needed an inexpensive place to stay both short term and long term. This was the precursor of motels which began popping up originally as little side-by-side cabins. The Stuart Auto Camp, one of the first in the area in 1923, was located south of the city limits of Miami on Dixie Highway, offering simple rental cottages with separate facilities for showers, bathrooms and laundry. There was also a dance pavilion, a restaurant and a gasoline station for the residents according to *Tin Can Camps' & Tourism: Exciting Fun*, by Alice L. and Greg E. Luckhardt.

In 1928, the family was listed in the Endicott-Binghamton City Directory at 200 North Street, Endicott, which was just down the road from the Endicott-Johnson Tannery and Shoe Company, one of the biggest most successful companies in the world at that time. In fact, North Street was originally part of the E-J Tannery and Shoe Company’s property, which promoted its “cradle to grave” care for its workers. They had their own doctors and pioneered their own free health care system. In 1928, Grampa was listed as a tanner and in the 1929 directory, he’s listed as a shoe worker. My brother Wayne has memories of Grampa showing him how to tan leather, passing on a skill he likely learned or honed at the shoe factory.

In July 1929, they left all this potential behind for a new home in rural Ontario. The move is puzzling and life for the Gallson family changed forever.

Six months after their arrival in Trout Mills, Ontario, on December 21, 1929, four days before Christmas, the most astounding thing happened.

GG threatened to kill herself and her children. She was delusional, thinking she was “damned and dangerous.” She was entered directly into the population of New Toronto Mental Asylum, bypassing the North Bay Mental Asylum, under warrant, diagnosed as “manic psychosis, manic.”

The children were told she was dead.

For years, Carol and I discussed and debated over this, doubting how a person sailing from England to Canada, crossing the border repeatedly then becoming a mother of three could suddenly spiral into insanity. It just didn't make sense.

An obvious possibility was the living conditions in the three-room house on the Trout Mills property. It is unlikely that it had indoor plumbing and my mother's memories of holes in the floor where she could see water in the cellar after a rain, testifies to the possible dilapidated and substandard conditions. Remember, GG was a domestic worker, a housekeeper, and a cleaning professional. That was her job.

It wasn't until around WWII that rural Ontario began to see indoor toilets. My parents were married in 1943 and lived in Bonfield Township in the same county as Trout Mills. Carol, born in 1948, remembers outhouses, pots under the bed, the septic tank being dug and the flush toilet replacing the chemical toilet in an upstairs bedroom.

The move into the Trout Mills house is depressing for me to merely think about but how could that alone spiral one into psychosis, unless something else was at play.

Aunt Jean was six years old and thought her mother had lost a pregnancy. While she admitted she could not be sure, she never faltered on the memory of her mother being taken away in an ambulance. In fact, this is also a memory my mother had. Uncle Phill, only three and a half years old at the time, remembered men in white coats. The common thread throughout was that GG was taken because she had gone mad. But was that the real reason?

Pregnancies were not talked about and, in fact, were hidden.

My mother had a particular memory of her mother slapping her when she crawled into her bed with her shoes on. To me, this begs the question: Why did this stand out in my mother's mind? None of the Three Musketeers had any memories of being physically stuck except for this.

But did three young traumatized children under the age of six actually know what they saw? I found images of a police paddy wagon and an ambulance on the internet from that era – there's not much difference.

1928 Police Wagon - 1929 Ambulance



The determining factor of which vehicle drove away with GG inside could have been economics. Ambulances and health care were not free in 1929 but the police services were. Through the Freedom of Information Act, I requested a search of the mental health facilities in that time period. After both a digital search and a manual search through their records, the Archives of Ontario could find no indication of anyone by that name being admitted to the North Bay Psychiatric Hospital or the North Eastern Psychiatric Hospital.

In reality, mental health care in northern Ontario communities was not established until the 1950s. In all likelihood, GG was taken by train directly to Toronto.

Thirteen months after GG was taken, a very sad and predictable thing happened which caused her to lose any hope of advocacy and family support. If recovery was at all possible, she no longer had a place to call home.

Jean, 6-months old, Florida, 1923



Jean and Joan Gallson ca. 1927



Jean and Joan Gallson ca. 1927



Jean and Joan Gallson ca. 1928-1929

Joan and Phillip Gallson ca. 1928-1929



Jean and Phillip Gallson ca. 1928-1929



Jean, Phillip and Joan Gallson ca. 1928-1929



Asylum

In 2009 my husband and I decided to leave the big city of Toronto and bought a home in rural middle Ontario near Georgian Bay. I went for a walk one morning and met an elderly woman who asked if I was new to the area. The conversation was short, but long enough for me to discover she was a retired nurse from a hospital in Toronto.

“Oh, which one?” I asked. I was familiar with Princess Margaret Hospital, Toronto General Hospital and Mount Sinai.

“Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital but it closed long ago,” the woman said. She continued to speak but I have to admit I didn’t pay much attention to the rest as I stared at her in stunned silence, feeling a *rush*.

She’d worked there after GG had been transferred to St. Thomas Hospital in 1945, but it was instances and *nudges* such as these that pushed me into more research. It seemed that as soon as I’d gone a couple of months without working on GG’s story, another *nudge* would push me back into the game.

Fifteen years later, we moved into a condo in Mississauga, a five-minute walk to a park on Lake Ontario. On a beautiful spring, blue sky day, I sat on a log along the beach. As I gazed east along the north shore, I spotted a boating entrance to another park which is adjacent to a football field. Across the road from the field, there are several identical buildings once called *cottages* where, up until 1945, the female patients of the Lakeshore Mental Asylum resided. I can get there in ten minutes yet it still feels a century away.

It wasn’t until I was twenty that I learned the official reason why GG had been committed and it was shocking. In February 1976, my sister received an answer from St. Thomas Psychiatric Hospital to her inquiry about our grandmother. Carol was just starting a family of her own and wanted to get some family medical history.

GG was admitted to this hospital on November 9, 1945, on transfer from the Lakeshore mental hospital, New Toronto, the original date of admission being 1929. In her admission documents, she was described as talking incessantly and threatening to kill the children and

herself; thinks she is damned; dangerous. ... diagnosed as “manic depressive psychosis, manic.”

GG’s birthdate was in her hospital records as November 12, even though her actual birthdate was November 21. I don’t know if this was a clerical error or if my grandfather made the error. Whichever the case, the hospital NEVER corrected it in all the years she was there as her death records contain the same error.

For many years after that, I thought that before the discovery of lithium, which became the go-to-drug for manic depression, or bipolar disorder, meant a lifetime in a mental hospital. I can even remember consoling myself that it was ONLY because lithium was not available until the 1940s, that my grandmother wasn’t in my life. With this miracle drug, she would be a normal loving grandmother, baking cookies and sending me birthday cards.

When we first found out GG was admitted to a mental institution, we made the assumption that she was generally, and perhaps genetically, mentally insane. However, according to the hospital’s admission records, she suffered a severe psychotic manic episode. I have no information as to GG’s state of mind up until this point. I was surprised to learn that manic depression, or Bipolar disorder, isn’t always a genetic mutation. In fact, stress-, trauma- and hormonal-events or possibly a combination of all three could trigger psychosis.

On top of this, there was a remote possibility that another factor came into play when she entered into a relationship with my grandfather. The symptoms of neurosyphilis mimic bipolar depression and manic episodes according to a cousin who is a Psychiatric Social Worker in New York state.

Once GG was removed from the family, the children were placed in temporary homes likely by the Children’s Aid Society, which is not a government organization and whose records are sealed in perpetuity.

I found a note in my files from a conversation I had with Aunt Jean around 1986, when she was about 63. Aunt Jean was the oldest and was close to seven years old at the time. She believed her mother “took sick” after losing a pregnancy. If this is true, the miscarriage itself and the cause could be among the traumatic multiple events that

pushed her into psychosis. On top of these things, GG suddenly thought she was damned and dangerous and felt like she and her children were better off dead.

I couldn't help but be haunted by thoughts of how the series of events unfolded on December 21, 1929, that took GG from the house near North Bay to a Toronto hospital. Everything I found on the internet suggests the following:

A complaint was made by "someone"

A justice of the peace or magistrate issued a warrant (#10948)

She was taken into custody and examined

Two physicians signed a document, committing her to a provincial mental hospital

She was transported by train with an escort from North Bay to Toronto

Then transported to the Mimico (New Toronto) Mental Asylum (registration #5358)

I found images on the internet of the Mimico Mental Asylum. There were large 19th century buildings, surrounded by smaller buildings called "cottages" with wide verandas across the front of each.

In 2009, I got an idea to join a theatre group called Etobicoke Players. I drove to the building where they held the plays, an early 1900s building on Lakeshore Boulevard in Toronto. I parked the car in a parking lot, looked straight ahead out the front windshield and saw a row of buildings. I felt the *nudge* and then a *rush*. I remember saying out loud "Oh my god! They're still standing." I knew immediately what I was looking at. The verandas were gone, but all the *cottages* were there.

The answer to a second letter of enquiry to St. Thomas Mental Institution, expressed regret that no other information was available for GG because of document retention rules but included autopsy findings that are NOT on the Medical Certificate of Death: pulmonary embolism (blood clot in her lung), senile emphysema (weird considering she was only 62) and aspiration of gastric contents (vomit in her lungs). That was hard to read and likely the true cause of her death.

Lakeshore Mental Asylum and Lakeshore Humber College Campus



The Certificate also stated that the cause of death was generalized arteriosclerosis (hardening of arteries) but after consulting my niece's doctor-husband, I learned that this is NOT a cause of death and that people live with that. The post-autopsy findings recorded on her Medical Certificate of Death made my stomach turn. Decubitus ulcers, commonly known as bed sores, were present but there was another word I could not for the life of me decipher. For months I stared at this word. My heart sank when I realized the word was Emaciation.

But the question remains: Why was GG not released after treatment?

Flora's 1960 Statement of Death

Form 15 PROVINCE OF ONTARIO
THE VITAL STATISTICS ACT

607917

STATEMENT OF DEATH

(For use of Registrar-General only)

1. PLACE OF DEATH
City, Town or Village of Blair Athol Street Address Catholic Hospital
(If death took place in a hospital or other institution, state the name thereof)

Township of Yamouche County or Territorial District of Elgin RD-09

2. DATE OF DEATH February 9 1960
(Month by name) (Day) (Year)

3. LENGTH DECEASED RESIDED (a) in municipality or place where death occurred 1 1/2 years 3 months (b) in Ontario 52 years (c) in Canada, if immigrant 92 years
(In years, months and days)

4. PRINT NAME OF DECEASED IN FULL
GALLSON
FLORA
(Surname) (Given names)

5. PERMANENT RESIDENCE OF DECEASED
City, Town or Village of TROUT CREEK Street Address RD-31
Township of Thedford County or Territorial District of Highway
Province or State Ontario Country Canada

6. SEX FEMALE 7. CITIZENSHIP CANADIAN 8. RACIAL ORIGIN ENGLISH 9. PROVINCE, STATE OR COUNTRY OF BIRTH ENGLAND
(Write male or female) (See note 1) (See note 2)

10. DATE OF BIRTH NOVEMBER 12 1897 11. AGE 62 2 18
(Month by name) (Day) (Year) (Years) (Months) (Days) If deceased died when less than one day old — hours or — minutes

12. (1) TRADE, PROFESSION OR KIND OF WORK Housewife
(2) TYPE OF INDUSTRY OR BUSINESS See note 1

13. (1) DATE DECEASED LAST WORKED AT THIS OCCUPATION Dec 21 1959 (2) TOTAL NUMBER OF YEARS DECEASED WAS ENGAGED IN THIS OCCUPATION 5
(Month by name) (Day) (Year)

14. (1) STATE WHETHER DECEASED WAS SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED OR DIVORCED Married
(2) IF DECEASED WAS MARRIED, WIDOWED OR DIVORCED STATE NAME OF HUSBAND OR MAIDEN NAME OF WIFE GALLSON
JOHN
(Surname) (Given names)

15. PRINT NAME OF FATHER NOT KNOWN
(Surname) (Given names)

16. PRINT MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER NOT KNOWN
(Maiden surname) (Given names)

17. BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER NOT KNOWN 18. BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER NOT KNOWN
(Province, State or Country) (Province, State or Country)

I CERTIFY THAT TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF, ITEMS 1 TO 18, BOTH INCLUSIVE, ARE TRUE AND CORRECT.

sd(M.F. Webster, M.D.) February 9 1960
(Month by name) (Day) (Year)
Blair Athol M. Thomas Staff Physician
(Print office address) (Signature of Informant)

Flora's 1960 Medical Certificate of Death

Form 16

PROVINCE OF ONTARIO
THE VITAL STATISTICS ACT
MEDICAL CERTIFICATE
OF DEATH

007917
(For use of Registrar-General only)

1. PLACE OF DEATH:
City, Town or Village of _____ Street Address Ontario Hospital
(If death took place in a hospital or other institution, state the same thereof)

Township of Yarmouth County of Elgin District of Elgin

2. PRINT FULL NAME OF DECEASED
GALLSON
FLORA

3. DATE OF DEATH February 9th 1960 4. SEX OF DECEASED Female 5. AGE 62
(Month by name) (Day) (Year) (male or female) (Years)

6. CAUSE OF DEATH
(Read carefully the instructions on the reverse side)

1 450.0
IMMEDIATE CAUSE—State the disease, injury or complication which caused death, not the mode of dying such as heart failure, asphyxia, as-thenia, et cetera.
(a) Generalized Arteriosclerosis 2
due to

MORBID CONDITIONS, if any, giving rise to immediate cause (state in order backwards from immediate cause).
(b) _____ due to
(c) _____

II
OTHER MORBID CONDITIONS (if important) contributing to death but not causally related to immediate cause.
Manic depressive Psychosis 31 yrs.

7. (1) IF DECEASED WAS A FEMALE, WAS THE DEATH ASSOCIATED WITH PREGNANCY? No (2) DURATION OF PREGNANCY _____ WEEKS (3) WAS THERE A DELIVERY? _____
(Yes or No) (Yes or No) (Yes or No)

8. (1) WAS THERE A SURGICAL OPERATION? No (2) DATE OF OPERATION _____
(Yes or No) (Month by name) (Day) (Year)

(3) STATE FINDINGS _____

9. (1) WAS THERE AN AUTOPSY? Yes (2) STATE FINDINGS as above and
(Yes or No) Amaciation, Decubitus ulcer

10. IF DEATH WAS DUE TO VIOLENCE STATE WHETHER IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, SUICIDE OR HOMICIDE. DATE OF INJURY _____
(Month by name) (Day) (Year)

STATE HOW THE INJURY WAS SUSTAINED _____

STATE NATURE OF INJURY _____

STATE WHETHER INJURY TOOK PLACE AT HOME, IN INDUSTRY, OR IN A PUBLIC PLACE _____

In my personal memorabilia from my own childhood, I have hospital invoices marked paid for my birth and when I swallowed a straight pin. Even though universal health care was introduced in Saskatchewan, Canada in 1947, the provinces didn't come to an agreement until January 1, 1961, five years after I was born and eleven months after GG died. Who paid for GG's mental health care?

Prior to 1961, it was the Hospitals for the Insane Act that laid out the financial obligations for the family. The parents or friends needed to enter into an agreement for payment. Payment needed to come from somewhere. First in line was Grampa and second was her estate.

The Three Musketeers hailed their father as a hero who made the choice and effort to bring them all back together under the same roof after they'd been split into temporary homes. Uncle Phill had a memory that a family wanted to adopt only him, and not the girls, but Grampa wouldn't allow it. Who would have a "waiting list" of adoptive or foster families? The Children's Aid Society.

This is the moment in time that Grampa could have left. His wife was institutionalized and his children were in the care of the CAS. He had an opportunity to just disappear. All he had was the farm and GG's name was on the deed. There were many hands waiting for money from Grampa. There can only be one conclusion: his moral compass pointed to keeping his children.

Sometime between December 22, 1929 and January 1930, Grampa bought an advertisement in the Toronto Star looking for domestic help.

In the summer of 1930, the Widdifield Town council published the minutes of their meeting in the North Bay Nugget. It included a full list of residents who owed money for road maintenance. Grampa's name was included. In July he owed \$12, in August he owed \$6 and in December he owed \$9. This would have exacerbated his mistrust of government and compounded his desire to get under the radar. Survival-driven. Decide quickly. Duck and hide.

As an interesting side note, Duncan McBeth, the neighbour my mother remembered, was the councillor who made the motion for the collection of money owing.

Mary Morrison

Around our house Grampa's second wife was known as "The Old Lady," but in her presence we had to call her Maw. She was not our grandmother, that was made clear. But the directive seemed to come from Maw herself. She did not want to be our grandmother. That was odd.

According to Mom, Aunt Jean and Uncle Phill, The Old Lady was wicked, beating and starving them when my grandfather was away working. I didn't learn until much later that she even had a name, Mary — or was it Margaret? Mom wasn't sure, and it didn't really matter to her.

I remember a family car trip to Mattawa on a summer Sunday to visit Grampa Gallson and Mary. Mom called them Paw and Maw. In my memory, this was the first time I'd ever met them and I was already about 6 years old. In the days of no seat belts, Wayne and I bounced around in the back seat of the car, making faces out the back windows at the drivers behind us, playing Eye-Spy, punching and slapping each other until I cried and tattled. Mom would then separate us into our respective sides of the back seat.

This particular Sunday Mom gave Wayne and me a stern lecture on Mary.

"Never call her Gramma, always Maw. She doesn't like to be called Gramma."

How strange and weird, I thought. I remember knowing at the time that Mary wasn't my real grandmother, so not calling her Gramma made sense, however the warning scared me.

When I saw her, my fears were all validated. She was short and hunched, I'm sure under five feet and had no teeth. Her hair was permed-curly, and under her discount-store blouse, her breasts hung down to her waist. When Mom said, "Now go outside and play with your cousins," I'm sure I ran. I was excited to hang out with my half-cousins who were about the same age as me and were all girls. Wayne hung out with Dad and Grampa in the barn most of the time we were there.

The house had a veranda or porch with an old tattered, upholstered, springy couch that somehow hadn't made it to the dump. It made an excellent trampoline until my cousin told me to stop because I might get caught by Maw. She told me how mean Maw was and she

would hold my hands in a hot frying pan. Those were lasting impressions I had of Mary until I read my mother's diary and heard from Aunt Barb's daughter, Gail, call Mary "my dear Granny Gallson".

Granny? Gail was allowed to call her that? Ok, so who really made the decision about how we were to refer to Mary? She obviously did not mind being called Granny.

Then there was the last thing Aunt Barb said to me before Carol and I left her that August 2025 afternoon in Mattawa.

"They think my mother was a witch. Promise you'll make it right in the book. Please tell the truth about her."

I promised.

Mary or Margaret, it didn't matter to my mother because she never referred to her in any way except as "The Old Lady".

In my early twenties, Mom and I were watching a movie on television together - Sybil - the true story about a child emotionally and physically abused by her mother who developed multiple personalities as an adult. It never occurred to me while watching this movie that it would be triggering for Mom. However, during a particularly abusive scene, she said, "That reminds me of my childhood. It wasn't that bad, but I felt like that." I don't remember the details of the ensuing conversation, but I do remember having a "Wow - wasn't expecting that!" reaction.

What was Mary's story?

Kirkfield, Ontario 1910

Mary Margaret Morrison was born September 6, 1910 in Kirkfield, Ontario, to Louisa Jane Foster and Thomas John Morrison. She was 13 years younger than GG and 14 years younger than my grandfather. Biologically, he was old enough to be her father.

Mary's father, Thomas, died after a ten-year battle with tuberculosis two weeks before Mary was born. Louisa, a widow with five children under the age of 10, moved to Oshawa. In the 1911 and 1921 census, Louisa's occupation was "boarding house". Mary was raised by a single mother who was trying to make ends meet by opening up her home to strangers. Barbara says in a recorded interview that Mary helped her mother with the boarding house that was occupied by a lot of veterans.

In September 1925, Mary turned 16 and by May 1926, she was pregnant and would now need to deal with her own stigma of being an unwed mother. Donald James Morrison was born February 23, 1927. His father was an older man who had "some connection to the boarding house".

When Mary became pregnant with her second child in October/November 1929 at the age of 19, Louisa insisted Mary have an illegal abortion and made an appointment sometime between Christmas 1929 and January 1930. In defiance, Mary answered an advertisement she found in a Toronto newspaper from a man by the name of John Gallson.

Trout Mills, Ontario 1929

Mary, desperate for an escape for herself and her illegitimate toddler son, answered an ad she found in the newspaper.

I searched through “Domestics Wanted” from December 21, 1929 to January 31, 1930 in Newspapers.com. There were a few possibilities, including these two, but truly it's very hard to say as no names are mentioned in ANY of the Domestics Wanted advertisements.

Experienced girl for general housework, able to do plain cooking. Box W207 Star.

Housekeeper wanted for working man, steady position, experience not necessary. State age and nationality. No objection to child. Apply box W457 Star.

On the same day as the abortion was booked, unbeknownst to Louisa, Mary packed a bag and left taking Donald for a rendezvous with a man she'd never met before. She likely asked Grampa to bring the children so she could meet them prior to making a final decision, but in reality for Mary, there was no going back.

Grampa went to the children's temporary homes arranged by the CAS, removed them, drove to Toronto and checked them into a hotel. After the meeting, Grampa, Mary and all four children packed themselves into Grampa's Model-T and headed for North Bay.

Mary's story of this meeting with Grampa also relates that the Children's Aid Society were looking for Grampa and that he felt an urgency to “get out of Toronto” quickly.

Neither Mary nor Grampa had money. Grampa found work for both of them butchering chickens behind the North Bay Airport. Donald (age 2), Uncle Phill (age 3), and Mom (age 5) were left in the care of Aunt Jean (age 7) while Mary and Grampa went to work.

Successive stories told to the children by Mary and Grampa morphed and changed as the years went by. Mary told them initially that “the woman” who lived there before was NOT their real mother, and was only there to look after them until Mary “returned”. Perhaps Mary was merely doing what she was told to do by Grampa. This made me realize why no pictures remained of GG with her babies. The ruse demanded the destruction of any evidence that the children had any mother other than Mary. A picture of Grampa holding Aunt Jean as a baby is evidence that GG had a camera and there **must** have been many pictures of her with her babies. Mom managed to find and hide a handful of photos.

In the 1931 Census, the Gallsons, living in the Widdifield farm house, consisted of two unrelated adults and five children in a three-room house.

John age 35, Labourer, Odd Jobs, Origin: Finnish
 Jeanette age 8, Origin: Finnish
 Joan age 6, Origin: Finnish
 Phillip age 5, Origin: Finnish
 Mary Morrison age 22, housekeeper
 Donald Morrison age 3
 John Morrison age 1

What the census doesn't reveal is that Mary is four months pregnant. My grandfather and Mary had entered into a sexual relationship sometime between the birth of Jackie Morrison in August 1930 and conception of James in February 1931. It only took thirteen months for GG to lose her advocacy and home support.

Mary claims an income of \$240 over the previous 12 months whereas Grampa's is only \$75. The memories of Mary related to Barbara, answers the question of how Mary made more money than Grampa - she continued working at the chicken farm which would not have been far from the Trout Mills farm. It was Mary's income that was holding the home together.

At some point, likely because Aunt Jean was too old to forget her mother, Mary and Grampa had to admit that Mary was not the Three Musketeers' real mother, but continued the facade that GG was dead.

Grampa worked on the construction of Highway 17 and in the bush with lumber crews, the latter taking him away for weeks at a time. Mary disciplined four, then five children likely out of sheer frustration and using the only method she would have known - corporal - which even by the day's standard bordered on abuse.

Mary initially took on the job of homeschooling the children which helped the family hide from three things: the government, hospital scrutiny and evidence of abuse. Maisie's son, Daniel, remembered Grampa as someone who did his best to live "off the grid".

Mattawa, Ontario 1931

This advertisement showed up in the August 12, 1931 issue of the North Bay Nugget newspaper.

FOR SALE OR RENT – 40 ACRE farm, 4 miles from North Bay and buildings. Write to J. Gallson, **Mattawa**, Ont.

The following month, Harvey Burrows, a merchant from North Bay, registered an “interest” in the property “in agreement of a mortgage” dated August 1, 1931. Harvey Burrows was the owner and operator of Burrows Country Store. His son would become the mayor of North Bay in 1995.

In researching the Burrows Country Store, Harvey’s granddaughter Debbie writes in an article, “I remember stories about the horse-drawn wagons and how they used to load up supplies at the store to take into the lumber camps”.

Grampa and GG likely put every penny they had into buying that 40-acre farm for \$140. But a year and a half later, Grampa, leaving GG behind, disappeared with his extended family into neighbouring Papineau Township.

The property took a year to sell, but perhaps worth the wait, as in July 1932, the parcel was sold to Helen Newby for \$500, but there was a catch. The property was **jointly** owned by Grampa and GG, so the sale was overseen by A. N. Middleton, her “Statutory Committee, Ontario Public Trustee”. Again, likely seen by Grampa as government oversight and interference.

When I first saw this, I thought the trustee was possibly someone assigned to GG to look out for her well-being, which caused me to feel a moment of relief but it was just that - a moment. I emailed the Ministry to get more information, thinking they would have a full file of information about GG. The answer was disappointing. The files were not alphabetical - they were numerical by a number assigned to the instance of the assignment. Without that number, they could not locate any file. Trustees were assigned, as required. I then knew that the government was not there for GG’s sake. They were there for the money. There could

not have been much left of the \$500 after the hospital's share and Harvey Burrows' share was removed. Did Grampa also have to pay Widdifield Township for the road repairs?

A year later, another advertisement showed up in the Toronto Star:

MARRIED man with family, willing to take full charge of farm. J. Gallson,
Mattawa, Ontario

Where in Papineau were the Gallsons between 1931 and 1933?

Somehow Grampa managed to scrape together \$10 to become one of the original chartered members of No. 254 Royal Canadian Legion in Mattawa in February 1933.

Grampa had found a "home" in Papineau Township in a shed on land owned by the Gilligan family. This shed became known in the family as Gilligan's Shack. When Mary and the five children joined Grampa, they were helped by the Gilligans to fix up the shed into something livable.

My mother had a vague memory that Mary never told her family in Oshawa where she was in those early years that she lived with the Gallsons, which Aunt Barb verified during our visit. According to my mother, the Morrisons searched "a long time" before finding her. Entries in Mom's diary in 1943 are testaments of her visits with Aunt Gladys, Mary's sister-in-law, and the comment that Aunt Gladys gave her a lot of "stuff", my Mom's first camera being among that "stuff".

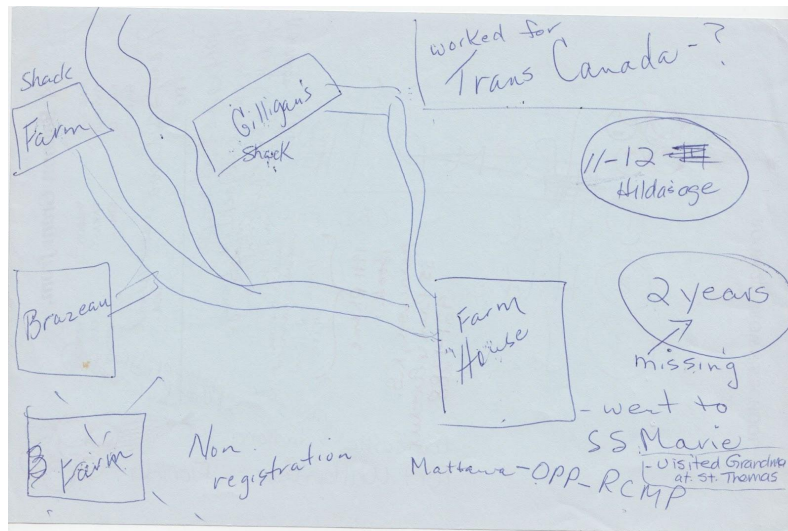
The Gallson children were led to believe that Jackie's biological father was my grandfather. They were too young to know enough to do the math. It wasn't until Jackie joined the army that the truth came out somehow according to my mother.



Mary Morrison - 1940



Original Papineau Township homestead



Map drawn by Hilda (Gallson) Howard ca. 2000

It shows Gilligan's Shack where Grampa isolated himself, her recollection that when Grampa was missing for two years he was in Sault Ste. Marie, that Grampa visited GG possibly during those two years, that the OPP and the RCMP were involved in trying to find him and that she was 11-12 years old at the time (1948).

The Gallsons were more or less destitute and Grampa seems to have been absent while working in remote areas. Mary walked back and forth into Mattawa to buy 50-pound bags of flour. Mrs. Emma Gilligan, a widow in her mid sixties and neighbour, taught Mary how to bake, sew and garden. She, as well as another neighbour, Violet Desjardins, brought second hand clothes for the children. Mary claims that she and Grampa were “happy living in the shack compared to what they had before”. This certainly gave me cause for reflection on how bad the house in Widdifield truly was.

Mary remembered Grampa having two “little” dogs that he trained to pull a sleigh to go into the bush to retrieve firewood.

Mary’s sister Sara sent money for the children’s winter coats. Instead, Mary used the money to rent a farm house a short walk from Gilligan’s Shack from Felix and Florence Bellaire. The house was full of bed bugs and with the help of Violet, they cleaned it out and made it livable. Violet continued to help the Gallsons for years.

It wasn’t until August 1940 that Grampa actually bought the farm for \$300.

Mom’s and Uncle Phill’s memories are all at this Papineau house. Mom never spoke about living in Gilligan’s Shack.

Mom recalled when she went to a brick-and-mortar school, she was in bare feet. The teacher found a pair of shoes for her to wear and reported bruises on Mom’s shoulders. “Authorities” did a wellness check and Grampa told Mary to “stop beating on the kids or they’d be taken away”. Grampa knew the power and authority of the CAS. He’d been down that road before. The children learned that complaining to their father only resulted in an increase of retribution from Mary.

Yet there were things that didn’t jibe with Mom’s account of her life under Mary’s corporal punishment. The Three Musketeers thrived in school, receiving above average marks. Mom and Uncle Phill skipped grades and were both exempt from writing the high school entrance exam with Grade eight honours certificates.

By the time the youngest, Betty, was born in 1942, Mary already had six children living at home under the age of 14. Aunt Jean and Mom, by then aged 17 and 16, were out and on

their own. In the end, Mary had raised ten children essentially by herself. Grandpa spent most of his time away working or self-isolating at Gilligan's Shack. Being away weeks or months at a time, the care and upbringing of the children was left to Mary during an era when hand-to-skin punishment was the normal way you kept your kids in line and it's possible that Mary knew no other way. It was the way many parents got their own frustrations out when they had no knowledge of other non-violent ways.



Jean, Mary Morrison & Joan



Phill "Bobby" and Mary Morrison "Mom"

As the years went by, the feelings Mom, Aunt Jean and Uncle Phill had towards Mary intensified. They all told and corroborated stories of childhood physical and mental abuse. And like a snowball, the stories got bigger and more detailed, only meaning that small events became big events, and big events became horrendous. The Three Musketeers were, without a doubt, traumatized as children and as adults.

Within the first few months of my parents' marriage, around 1944, Mary became very ill and my mother thought her years of wishing "The Old Lady" was dead had finally been answered. She was so sure that it was her fault, Mom prayed and begged God for forgiveness. Mom returned to Mattawa for an extended period of time to take care of Mary while she recuperated.

When we were children, there were "Gallson Reunions" at Champlain Provincial Park near Mattawa when all the siblings, half-siblings and their children joined together for a picnic. They were huge and wonderful, and these were the only times we were able to get together with the step-Gallsons.

It is interesting to think that if I had no knowledge of any abuse or mistreatment by Mary, here's what would stand out.

While pregnant with Jackie at 19 years old, Mary worked slaughtering chickens in 1930 to help support the family. With the help of a neighbour, she transformed Gilligan's Shack into a livable house, "better than what they had before." She learned how to cook, bake, garden, sew and alter clothing for all the children. She home schooled the children well enough that they skipped grades. She went to work at Guelph Cask Mill in Mattawa to help support the family as Grampa's income was small.

Mary's sister sent money to help clothe the children, but Mary used the money to rent a house. She transformed the house at the new property, "filled with bedbugs", into a livable home. She was given the task of rationing scarce food amongst six or more children. There was no room or tolerance for pilfering. She carried 50-pound bags of flour from Mattawa to the farm, about a 30-minute walk. She protected the children by hiding any knowledge that their mother was in a mental asylum. Mary raised ten children alone, three not her own.

Mary involved herself in the county's politics and in 1966, Mary ran and won a seat on the Papineau County council with 66 votes, but lost her seat in 1969. She was also active in the Legion's Women's Auxiliary.

Aunt Hilda told me that Grampa disappeared repeatedly, spending months at Gilligan's Shack just to get away from Mary. When I heard this I thought of Grampa hiding out in a run-down ramshackle shed, but after finding out that Gilligan's Shack was the Gallsons actual home for a few years, perhaps it made a decent cabin get-away.

In September of 1975, Mary turned 65. She filed for a "Delayed Birth Registration" on October 28, likely because she needed her Old Age Security and Canada Pension Plan benefits on which to thrive.

It wasn't until my mother entered her twilight years, my sister Carol began to feel uncomfortable with the continued use of the term "The Old Lady", and we started referring to Mary by her given name. And it became evident that during the years after 1929, the memories discussed and corroborated between The Three Musketeers right into their adulthood, amplified the "evil" they saw in Mary and tainted any hope that GG's children and grandchildren would ever care or consider that there may be an alternate narrative.

Aunt Barbara's family developed a loving bond with Mary while they lived in a trailer on the Papineau farm property, helping each other get through life. Gail describes Grampa as "a quiet man, seldom spoke or was not present."

On August 17, 1976, Grampa transferred his sole ownership of the farm to joint ownership with Mary. It was around this time that Grampa and Mary were legally married and Grampa moved into a rooming house, leaving Mary for the last time.

Three years after the death of my grandfather, on July 14, 1982, for reasons unbeknownst to anyone, the farm was transferred to Betty and her husband. The land transfer states the property was worth \$40,000, yet Mary was only given \$17,590 resulting in a legal battle and a resolution that permanently severed the relationship between Betty, her siblings and her mother.

In 2024, the Papineau farm house was torn down.

Gail describes her “dear Granny Gallson” as a warm, loving grandmother who helped her in many ways. Aunt Barbara said that her mother would never have talked to me about GG and then dementia consumed any memories that were left. To the best of my knowledge, my mother never visited Mary after Grampa left her the last time. In the end, Mary was estranged to all her children except Barbara, who continued to support her until her death in 1990 at the Mattawa Nursing Home.



Mary Gallson ca 1990

Missing 1947

A North Bay Nugget article from December 13, 1947 stated that John Gallson allegedly got up on November 30, 1947 and disappeared from his Papineau County home. The article says Mary thought he had gone into the bush to work for his “employer” and reported him missing two weeks later, on December 13th. It's also interesting that Mary told the paper and the police that Grampa could be suffering from amnesia, caused by a shrapnel head injury during WWI. By reporting this, did Mary inadvertently confess that Grampa's wartime head wound had left him with more than a superficial scar? Which begs the question, if he was suffering from signs of amnesia, how long had this been going on?

What Mary didn't know at the time, was that Grampa had purposely disappeared and was hiding in a lumber camp in the forests of Goulais River, Algoma. Grampa's letter to Mom in December 1948 expressed a wish to not be found.

Grampa's service in World War I as a sapper would forever change him especially after suffering a shrapnel wound to his head, possibly while doing his “job” as Wayne described. Contracting an incurable venereal disease involving excruciating treatments may have also had an effect on his critical thinking and judgement. His English was so poor, the doctors thought he was “mentally dull”, his wife, and the mother of his children was hospitalized with an “incurable” psychosis that he couldn't help or pay for. His siblings were either dead or begging for help that he couldn't give. He learned at an early age that governments were not to be trusted. Is it any surprise that this man withdrew into himself, isolating into the forests of Nipissing and Algoma Districts or in an abandoned shack in Papineau? The word used by Mary to Aunt Barb was that Grampa was “silent”. Yet, the letters to his family back in Estonia, in his own language and his letters in English to Mom, were very “newsy”.

Date: Sunday, November 28, 1948, one year after he disappeared

Place: Goulais River, % Algoma Forest

Timeline: My mother, Joan is 23 and is married to my father, Lloyd. Carol is 9 days old.

Uncle Phill, whose nick name was Bobby, is 22 and has not yet been deployed to Korea and has not met his future wife, Marian. Grampa is 52. According to Barbara, Grampa had a day job at a store and also a girlfriend - “a fling”.

Hello Joan:

Got your letter some days ago, and sure was surprised to hear from you and that yours are all well and getting along OK. So Lloyd didn't have any luck, too bad, he may have time yet. I just saw some fellows going by here this morning still going hunting. Not very many around here. Quite a few tracks through the bush. We've been having so damn much rain and snow this fall, the bush sure here is muddy. I don't yet (know) how they (are) going to saw them saw logs with all that mud on them. I've been working day work now for some time. The bush is not much good for jobbing and we have over 2 miles to walk _?_ and nights. I'm not making much, but I keep going any way. We are only 27 miles from Soo on Highway 17. Went to town last Saturday. I may go again next Saturday, take in the show in the afternoon. The bus leaves Soo 5 pm. Something to help and do away with the time over week end.

About coming down that way; well I don't know when that will be, of course I guess I could come to your place alright. No body knows me around there, but I supposed it would soon get around. Too I had a letter from Bobby some time ago. Too he is saying something about going to work for 3 months. May be he'll be wise if he did do that. He'll be making some thing any way. I don't think he'll do so good with his present job either after Xmas.

Now I guess I will bring my letter to a close. Wishing you all the best of luck and health, had a letter some time ago from Jean.

*Best wishes, from your father, **With love***

P.S. Hoping to hear from you again soon, Paw.

Date: Friday, December 17, 1948

Place: Goulais River, % Algoma Forest

Timeline: About three weeks after the letter above.

Hello Joan:

Got your letter and parcel OK and I am thanking you for it, but you shouldn't have bothered about it all. The shirt I haven't tried on yet so I don't know whether it will fit or not, I hope so anyway. The weather this way has been pretty stormy and today its [sic] bad enough. No body went out to work that's why I am writing this letter. I don't know when I will get it posted. May be not till Saturday, of course which is tomorrow. I may go to town myself yet. I don't know because we don't work here Saturday afternoon. Any way every body nearly is going home only 27 miles from Soo. So its not far to go if any one has home to go for., but when ever I'd go down I'd take the 5 pm bus back. Cost only 60 cents on the bus. I was going to send you something, but you

know the way I am. I didn't know just what to get, so I am sending this. You can buy something for the kids. Anyway this is all now. Wishing you all the best of luck and health and very happy Xmas & New year and hoping to hear from you again soon.

I am as ever

Your Father

Bye bye, Paw.

Newspaper Article - Dec. 13, 1947

Mattawa Man Is Reported Missing

MATTAWA, Dec. 13—John Gallson, 50, has been missing from his home in nearby Township of Papi-neau since November 30, it was learned today. A married man with a family, Gallson arose early on the morning of November 30 and has not been seen or heard from since.

It was believed Gallson had returned to his work in the bush with his employer but when he had not, the police were summoned. Provincial Constable A. J. Parry is investigating.

At the time of his disappearance, Gallson was wearing grey work pants, a brown mackinaw coat and a brown fur hat. He is approximately five feet and nine inches and weighed 150 pounds. He had blue eyes, fair hair, fair complexion, and wore a small moustache.

An Estonian by birth, Gallson speaks broken English. There is a possibility that he is an amnesia victim as he suffered shrapnel wounds in the head while serving in World War 1. His family is anxious to receive word of his whereabouts and any information

regarding this man should be forwarded to the provincial police at Mattawa.

The Accidental Letter

Uncle Phill's biography is in the Appendix of this book, but the following portion of his life sheds enormous light on the clouded and shadowy lives of GG and Grampa Gallson.

The Three Musketeers were Americans by birth so in 1947 Uncle Phill was drafted and completed his basic training as a surgical technician in Denver, Colorado. He served at the 172nd Station Hospital in Sendai, Japan, and after his honourable discharge, he enrolled himself into a six-month photography course in Memphis, Tennessee. He then returned to Mattawa to open his own photography studio in the summer of 1948.

Pardon the military pun, but why the about-face? Why *then*? In November 1947, his father had disappeared and by the summer of 1948, had not been found.

Uncle Phill was an honourable man who would do the right thing for his family. Grampa's disappearance meant that Mary, who Uncle Phill still regarded as his mother, and his younger half siblings needed someone to help look out for them. It is not unreasonable to assume that Uncle Phill came back to Canada and opened a photography studio in Mattawa to be close to his family.

Gallson Studio was a busy business between 1948 and 1950 in Mattawa. Phill Gallson or Gallson Studio were credited with many photos in the North Bay Nugget during those years. But Uncle Phill had become a man of the world and once you leave your small hometown, as they say, you can never go back.

By this time, Grampa had opened a post office box — *Box 306*. It's possible that Gallson Studio also had a post office box which meant there were only two Gallsons with boxes at the Mattawa post office.

At some point during these years, a letter was delivered to Uncle Phill instead of my grandfather. It was from a mental institution in St. Thomas, Ontario. It wasn't an update on the health and wellbeing of a patient. It was asking for money for dressing gowns for a patient by the name of Mrs. Flora Gallson.

Uncle Phill immediately called the hospital who confirmed his mother was there and alive. He wanted to see her but the hospital advised him not to come – she was "too far gone" – a visit would only upset both him and her.

So he didn't go.

After Christmas of 1948, Uncle Phill took a few months away from his business to be with his father in the bush. I do not believe this was a coincidence. In November 1948, Grampa wrote to Mom that he thought Bobby (Uncle Phill) was not going to do well in his job after Christmas and that he'd be wise to go "to work for 3 months" so he'd be "making something". I believe this meant Uncle Phill would be joining Grampa in the bush which he did, returning in March 1949.

When Grampa came out of hiding and returned to Mattawa, Uncle Phill headed back to the U.S. to reenlist. In 1953, after serving in Korea and Japan and while on leave, he returned to Mattawa and met the most beautiful woman in town, a recent England emigrant, Marian Gamble.

Three bridal showers were held in honour of Marian: one in Rutherglen at our house, one in North Bay at Mrs. A. B. Wallace's house, and one in Mattawa at Aunt Jean's house. Mary, Barbara (age 17), Hilda (age 14) and Maisie (age 12) were not listed as being in attendance.

Nor were any of them invited to the wedding.

If Grampa and Uncle Phill bonded during the several months they were in the bush together in 1949, something happened between 1949 and 1953. Aunt Barbara confirmed that not being invited to the wedding left a lasting scar and much hurt within the extended family. Uncle Phill's wedding announcement says he is the son of "Mr. J. Gallson and **THE LATE MRS. GALLSON** of Mattawa." Mattawa residents who knew the Gallsons must have thought Mary had died as no one there knew anything about GG.

Aunt Marian's sister, Helen, was 15 years old when she was maid of honour at the wedding. Helen declared to Uncle Phill's daughter, during a 2024 visit, *in no uncertain terms* the only family members that were welcome at the wedding were Mom and Aunt Jean. The wedding

was held in Mattawa, a small village at that time, where everyone knew everyone. Grampa did not attend either.

When the telegram came from St. Thomas Mental Institution that GG had died in 1960, Aunt Barbara remembered Mary throwing it in the fire and then burning any remaining clothes of GG's. Mary hated GG, a woman she'd never met but a woman who inexplicably was a threat even in death.



Uncle Phill in front of his photography studio in Mattawa



The Estonian Letters

This section is about the letters Grampa received from and sent to his siblings in Estonia. I cannot imagine what it was like for Grampa to receive these desperate letters begging for help in the 1950s. It is enormously difficult to help others when you are in need of help yourself. While Grampa was better off in Canada than his siblings, he really had nothing to give. He would have received letters from the “home country” telling him of the death of his sister Juuli at the age of 20 then his brother Kaarl at the age of 26 and the birth and death of a baby sibling, Eduard. Grampa’s one remaining brother, also named Eduard, who was born after Grampa left Estonia, believed that Canada equaled prosperity that could be shared with family and he was undeterred in this belief.

When Grampa died, the collection of letters written by his brothers Eduard Õunpuu and August Õunpuu, his sister Aliise Tähtvãli and Aliise’s good friend Aliide Ader made their way to Mom’s step-brother, Jackie. When Jackie discovered I was researching my family’s history, he gave the letters to Mom. It felt like I had been given a window into my grandfather’s past and I would be able to learn something about my Estonian relatives. I remember staring at the letters, holding them, opening the envelopes carefully and slipping out each folded page. As I unfurled them, my heart sank with the realization that I couldn’t understand one word of Estonian.

Through the Estonian Heritage Society in Etobicoke, I found Ellen Irs, an Estonian who volunteered to translate over 50 letters. When I sent her a cheque, she sent it back.

A few months after I began corresponding with Kaido, Eduard’s son in Estonia, he sent me an amazing gift - a collection of letters Grampa had sent to his father enabling me to read both sides of the correspondence.

All these letters are an amazing and, at times, heart breaking look at life in Estonia during that time. An excerpt from Aliise’s letter to Grampa:

Your letter was easy to understand, it was written just as we speak. I remember your letters from old. I believe those were not written as well as your writings now.

Those “letters from old” would have been fantastic to read, but it's interesting that Grampa seemed to improve his Estonian writing into the mid 1950s, but those language skills gradually declined until his last letter in 1978. Ellen noted that his writing style went from conversational to formal school writing as Grampa tried to cling to his language.

The letters provide a look into Grampa’s state of mind during these years. Ellen wrote in 1992:

“It was very interesting to notice how he [Grampa] was – over so many years – getting into difficulties in expressing himself in Estonian. Pity, that he did not get in touch with any Estonians near Mattawa. ... However, these letters were very easy to translate, as they were short and within limited vocabulary. However, I admired his constant good will to keep in touch with his brother.”

There is only one letter from Eduard addressed to *John Gallson, Mattawa, Ontario*, in 1946. All the others were addressed specifically to *Box 306, Mattawa, Ontario*. These letters were not delivered directly to the farm where Mary was, but to a post office box in town.

More importantly and noticeably absent from these particular letters from Grampa are family names. Grampa never mentions the names of GG, Mary or any of his children. However, the “letters of old” contained information about his marriage to GG and her eventual institutionalization.

While I truncated many of the letters, eliminating parts that are repetitive and superfluous to the story, what I chose to present below contains fragments of muted glass from the shattered window of their lives. Once found and extracted, they form a colourful mosaic of my grandfather’s life.

Eduard Õunpuu

Eduard was born September 12, 1915 in Mustjala County, Saaremaa, Estonia.

The August 2, 1946 letter was not the first from Eduard and at this time Grampa's life was either already in great turmoil or on the precipice. GG had just been transferred to St. Thomas the year before and, this is only a guess, the hospital had likely tracked him down to recover the costs of GG's upkeep.

The collection of letters from Grampa to Eduard is incomplete yet they show how he avoided any of Eduard's questions regarding GG's whereabouts and existence. In all likelihood, Grampa regretted telling anyone about GG, and vowed in his mind not to share too much family information. Why? He didn't elaborate on Mary, never once saying her name or the names of his children. He only sent a picture of himself in his army uniform and another, years later, of himself holding his cat. The only achievement on which he elaborated was his son being in the U.S. Army. Was this a sign of the amnesia Mary referred to?

It's also significant to note how little Canada is mentioned. Eduard seemed fixated on his brother and family being in "America" and his daughters having American husbands. While there's no denying that life in "America" was exponentially better than Estonia at that time, Grampa could not convince Eduard that he had no extra disposable cash. I wonder if there was an ulterior motive for Grampa sending one of his last notes on the back of his 1977 war pension cheque stub showing the meager \$33, which converts to \$173 in 2025.

As the years went by, it's obvious that Grampa's Estonian language deteriorated. The letters became shorter and shorter and often said the same thing, *"I'm alive and glad you are too."*

To Eduard (age 31); From John (age 50); August 2, 1946.

Contextual: This was prior to Grampa's disappearance in November 1947. My great-grandfather, Mihkel was still alive. Comparing the methods of harvesting is noteworthy.

Dear brother:

I received your letter a couple of days ago and was again glad to understand that you are alive and well which makes me feel well also. Weather here is quite hot at present time and I am in the middle of hay harvesting. This year we do not have a lot of hay. In this country we do not do it by hand as it was customary in the old country. We have machinery for that purpose. Of course it all takes a lot of money to buy it all. Old father is then already quite old 83. I myself perhaps will never see these days. Presently I do not know what more to write. I have no news from here to give you.

Wishing you finally good health and much luck and remain again waiting for your reply.

Your brother

John

To John (age 60); From Eduard (age 41); July 11, 1956, Kardla, Estonia

Contextual: There was an obvious ten-year break in the correspondence, I thought initially due to life circumstances as Eduard married in 1945 and began his family. However, from 1946 to 1956, Estonia was controlled by the Soviet Union, who sealed its borders and maintained strict control of all written communications. It was a time known as the High Stalinism era. Letters were censored and sending one to a capitalistic country branded you a traitor and resulted in deportation to a Siberian labour camp - a Gulag. Even buying an international stamp invited scrutiny from postal clerks who were required to report such activities. The USSR even required all typewriters to be registered so authorities could identify where the letter was typed.

Hiiu is Estonian for Hiiumaa, an island just north of Saaremaa Island. Eduard gives a great summary of Grampa's family: the death of his parents, an update on his siblings Aliise, Julius and August. But contrary to what Eduard concluded, August did NOT die in the war.

Hello brother,

*I am writing **again** after 10 years from Estonia. When receiving this letter you might think from where it possibly comes but I am alive and well with all my family. I still reside on this **small Hiiu island** where I remained after the war. Since then 10 years have passed when I received your last letter. This was on August 2, 1946 mailed by you. Many years have gone by again and who knows if this letter reaches you or are you alive? I myself was not able to send letters from Estonia to you and during this time perhaps many things may have happened.*

*I am sure you don't know that in your old country in your birthplace Saaremaa the circumstances are not the same as they were when you were there. **Our father has died, as well as our mother many years ago.** At home resides now our **sister Alice with her small son.** I live here on Hiiu island over 12 years. **Brother Julius lives in Parnu neighbourhood and works in Bricket Factory.** During the war **we lost trace of brother August, presumably he was killed in action.** So what are left from us are myself, brother Julius and sister Alice. You of course, do not remember much of them as well as myself.*

My wife's cousin lives in Canada, Ontario, Toronto who wrote recently to us. We have heard that most of Estonians there live quite well and have established themselves.

I think that I do not write any more as I don't know whether this letter reaches you or are you alive. So much time has passed.

If you do receive my letter, please be so kind as to write me at this address:

Greetings from my wife and daughter,

Your brother, Eduard.

To John (age 60); From Eduard (age 41); September 2, 1956, Kardla

Contextual: Even though Estonia would remain under USSR control until 1991, the High Stalinism era changed with the Khrushchev Thaw. Gulags were closed and the period of violent paranoia began to ease. Eduard likely speaks for all of Estonians in his feelings of being isolated and his fear of being cut off from the outside world. His comment that because Grampa had four children, he was “richer” than he was is a key to perhaps Grampa’s 1929 decision of keeping his children together. Eduard’s request for the gift of a hat was obviously huge to him.

Dear brother

I received your letter today and am sending my reply the same day. I am very glad that you are alive and well and you replied to my letter. I am most interested how you are doing there far away, separated from all relatives.

***We have been isolated a long time from outer world** therefore would like to know more of your life. You were afraid that you cannot write in Estonian and I was also afraid. But now I realize that **you write quite well** and all is understandable and readable to us. I hope that you will be able to write to me in the future, although it may be difficult. Who knows when you wrote in Estonian in your recent past. I hope you do not mind that I reply so quickly and am inquisitive about your life.*

*You wrote that you work in the forest. Please explain what kind of work it is. Are you cutting trees with a saw and how are you getting paid? You must be an old man as I am already 41 years old. You were at the time of my birth a grown-up man. Although we have never seen each other, the knowledge that one has a brother there far away makes one often think of this fact. You have 3 daughters and one son. **You are richer than I**, as I have only 1 daughter so far.*

Please write with whom your children married. Are they Americans and how are they doing? What are their jobs? I would like to see your children even possibly through pictures if you happen to have photos. If you have family pictures please send some to me. From you I have an old picture. There you are young and in an army uniform. I have no pictures from later years. Please do not misunderstand me, I hope you can read my letter.

I am living in my old ways. I work, the pay is miserable but some way we have to manage from hand to mouth. We do not have these possibilities that you have but in general our life has improved since right after the war.

I have a big request if you are able to help me. I would like to obtain a hat. Here they are not manufacturing these after the war. Please if your financial situation permits, buy me a dark blue hat and try to send it by mail. It is better if you would prepay all mail expenses. Here it will be an impossible sum of money to release it from the post office. All people who send parcels are prepaying the postal expenses. We then receive our parcel without trouble. My head measurement is small. 56cm. I do not know whether you have there cm measurers.

We have in old times foot and inch. Now is meter and centimeter. My head measure in inches is 22 in case you need to know.

I am also including a simple piece of thread, you can check the size of the hat with that. I very much request, if you could manage that yourself or if you do not have the money perhaps your children can help you but please send it to me. It will remain as a beautiful remembrance from my far-away brother.

*How are you doing yourself? **10 years ago you were very poor** but how is it now? Are you living in town or in country? Please write me about that.*

*Here in Estonia are **living your brother Juluis and sister Alice**. There are no more relatives left. They are also writing to me. My wife and daughter are laughing that I am asking to have a hat. I hope that you will meet my request and will write more about your life.*

Many greetings to you from my family and myself. Remain waiting your reply,

Your brother, Eduard.

To Eduard (age 41); From John (age 60); October 22, 1956 (five days before my birth)

Contextual: Grampa states he is “working by day”, meaning he has a “day” job, likely in the bush or on the highway. Grampa’s one dead son is Donald, who was actually Mary’s son and not blood related to Grampa at all. Donald died in a car accident in 1951. Uncle Phill is the son who is in the American Army.

Dear brother:

I received your letter two months ago and I was very happy to understand that you are alive and well, as I am also in the same situation. I am alive and well and am working the old way; more difficult work for me is to write to you or to understand it.

*I am **working by day**, salary is not very bad, but cost of living in this country is also high. All things are expensive so there is nothing left from it all.*

*I was looking for your hat but there is no blue one anywhere. As I told you I have 3 daughters and 1 son but they are married, I also have 2 sons and 3 daughters, youngest is 16 years old. **One son is dead**. They all have married Canadian husbands. One has 3 children and three have 2 children. **One is in American Army in America**. He has been there more than 8 years. He has a wife and 2 children.*

I wish you all good health and much luck and remain to await for your reply.

Your old brother

John

From Eduard (age 41); To John (age 60), November 11, 1956 (truncated)

Contextual: This letter reveals more about Grampa’s sister Aliise. Her letters, in the following section, expose her desperation and devastation. Eduard again mentions GG, the “first wife” and wonders about her.

*I have not received any letter from my sister who lives at your birthplace in Saaremaa. Last letter was sent long time ago. **Then she lived quite miserably**. Her **health is bad** and she was unable to work. Brother Julius lives in Estonia. He works at Tootsi Brikett Factory.*

*You there have such a big family. It is not surprising that money is scarce because you had to bring up all children as well as schooling them. You had with your first wife 4 children and with the second also. **Is your first wife deceased?** And you are married with the second?*

From Eduard (age 42); To John (age 61); February 24, 1957

Contextual: Grampa finally sent the hat and gifts for Eduard's family, but his description of the "mix up" at the post office regarding the postage is revealing, as well as the ways Estonians avoided paying the high duties. Eduard's week's wages of 107 rubles are equal to about \$275US today – duty and postage for possibly three hats. Eduard sounds like he didn't trust the post office, asking how much Grampa actually paid, which was only \$1.55 for postage. He's also very nostalgic with regards to the home on Saaremaa Island, mentioning that the house itself burned down. With it, went all the "letters of old". What Eduard doesn't mention is that Aliise was living in the house, so when it burnt, she moved into one of the other buildings.

Greetings, brother!

*I received your parcel and would like to thank you. This was sent as a Christmas and New Year's gift for me and my family. The hat was the right size and fitting, also my wife and daughter were well satisfied with their fits. When I picked up the parcel, I **had to pay duty which came to 107 Rubles. That is about one week's wages.** I believe you had not paid for postage or duty. Other people who receive parcels from America do not pay anything. Even so it was worth the contents of the parcel. When you write let me know how much you paid. Many people who send parcels scratch the contents so the items seem to be used and are cheaper to send. I believe you spent your money on me and I will not be able to repay you.*

*There is little hope that we will ever meet face to face. However you are still dear to me. You have been away so many years that you would not remember anything. I, too, have been far from my birthplace but I remember every stone and tree. My father used to tell me that **you had built the fence around our yard when you were 16 - 17 years old**, and part of that fence is still standing. **The house has burned down** but the other buildings are still there.*

Why do I write about these things since you don't remember them anymore. You have a new country and are living in different circumstances.

I wish you all the best and thank you once more for the parcel and will be expecting your letter.

Your brother Eduard with family

To John (age 61); From Eduard (age 42); May 1, 1957 (truncated)

Contextual: Eduard again asks for information about GG.

Dear brother,

I thank you again for the parcel and again ask you not to send any currency. One can do nothing here with your currency. Even if one exchanges it, it is of little value. It is strange that I had to pay additionally for the parcel. My wife is working as a weaver and I have a job at (?). The pay is low and we can hardly make ends meet.

Surely you over there have all kinds of merchandise in your shops which we do not have. Nevertheless, life is not cheap there either, but salaries (wages) are higher than here.

*Are any of your children still with you or are they all scattered over America? You have not said whether you are still married. **I remember you telling me that your first wife was British and that she had a mental breakdown. Is she still alive** or did you marry an American? You could write about it.*

To John (age 61); From Eduard (age 42); July 29, 1957 (truncated)

Contextual: The USSR took away private land from Estonian farmers, grouping all farms into volkhoz, massive, collective, state-controlled farms, where the farmers were forced to work and live off of whatever was left after the government took their share. Some Estonians were allotted an acre for themselves.

*A few families keep a cow in common. So far we have had enough milk. Keeping a cow is connect with hardships. There is no pasture. Things here are no longer as they used to be. **Now land belongs to the state.** It is organized into volkhoz and everyone works in a volkhoz.*

*P.S. Write whether you live alone or you have a wife. Which of your children is still living with you? **What happened to your first wife?***

To Eduard (age 42); From John (age 61); August 20, 1957 (truncated)

Contextual: So much had changed for Estonia since Grampa lived there before 1913. He may not have thought twice about revealing he owned “a lot of land” and had “50 acres under hay”. This would have seemed luxurious to Eduard.

I also made hay. I do not have any cows have only 2 horses. I have a lot of land under hay. I could not use it all. There is over 50 acres under hay. I live near a small town. It is called Mattawa, 1 1/2 km from home the field is. We have (like you say) also a radio set, but I have not heard any Estonian program. Although there is Finnish and Ukrainian or in Russian languages and in French.

To John (age 61); From Eduard (age 42); September 22, 1957 (truncated)

Contextual: Canadian and American money was worthless in the USSR in 1957. In an earlier letter, 107 Rubles equalled about \$275US when it came to Eduard paying for the duty on Grampa’s package. Yet in this letter, Eduard says a friend cashed in \$600US for 90 Rubles = \$0.15US for one Ruble = one plain shirt.

*You had enclosed a dollar in your letter. I am going to return it as we cannot get anything for it. If I exchanged it to rubles I could probably buy a pack of cigarettes. Therefore, I am going to return it. Long time ago one could buy something here with American money, but not any more. Russian money is expensive now. It does not pay to exchange dollars. Somebody had sent **600 American, the recipient received only 90 rubles**. This is so little that one could buy with it only a plain shirt.*

If you could afford, would you send me a summer coat (gray). My size 52, as I am tall 173cm.

Now you are going back to your forest work. You have 2 horses. What are you going to do with them? Would it not be more profitable to have a cow?

To John (age 62); From Eduard (age 43); July 3, 1958 (truncated)

Contextual: Eduard continues to live “hand to mouth”. He introduces his son Kaido, who I corresponded with in my early days of researching my family history. He also continues to describe how bad Aliise’s life is.

We share a cow with several other families. It's hard to be without a cow since it is expensive to buy milk.

My family is now more numerous. I had a daughter and now I have also a son. The son is called Kaido and is two months old.

Did you get a letter from your sister? She asked for your address. She lives on Saaremaa where you were born. Her husband died and she lives alone with her little son and her life is not easy. Her health is failing and causes her problems.

To Eduard (age 57); From John (age 75); January 18, 1972 (truncated)

I received your letter a couple of days ago and was again glad to receive it; that you are still alive and well. I am also alive and keep going from day to day. I am not as you well know very young. I am already 75 years old.

So I don't know whether August is still alive or is gone there where weather is not so severe.

I do not know how long I myself (last?)

To Eduard (age 57); From John (age 75); March 27, 1972 (truncated)

Contextual: This is the first time Grampa has divulged information about his life: his pension cheques, his war service, his time in the U.S. and actually living in New York City. And he’s also asking questions about Eduard. These years lead up to the time when Grampa left Mary for the last time and moved into a rooming house.

You seem to have good work. What kind of work it is? Are you working in factory or outside?

I am also a pensioner.

*In this country one gets pension when one is 70 years old, but **I receive 2 pensions**. One old age pension and other war-time pension. **I was 3 years soldier during the war. I was in Belgium and France. I was little somewhat hurt (wounded) and spent a couple of months in hospital in England.***

I also lived in America 9 years. Then I returned to Canada, I lived once in New York City, Toronto is 300 miles from Mattawa. I think that it will be difficult for me to speak Estonian because I have had not chance to talk in Estonian.

To Eduard (age 59); From John (age 78); November 6, 1974

Contextual: Pahapilli is the village on Saaremaa Island that was Grampa's home. Kardla is on Hiiumaa Island, where Eduard lived. Grampa's letters are becoming very short, only a few sentences, but he continues to write. A few of the "letters" are scattered with English words.

Hello [English] brother:

I received your letter and was happy that you are still alive and well.

*I also spend one day to another. There is still 7 days until I get 79 years old. How far is this place, Kardla from Tallinn? And **is there still somebody in the village of Pahapilli?***

To Eduard (age 60); From John (age 79); June 5, 1975 (truncated)

I am receiving my pension a long time, old-age pension and also war-pension. I was 3 years in Army [Army is written in English].

So there are not very many people in Pahapilli village.

To John (age 80); From Eduard (age 61); November 9, 1976 (truncated)

I have been waiting for your letter, but I have not received one. Are you sick (fallen ill). because you are quite an old man. I am also 61 years old. and I am a pensioner. I am not working any more. I am not healthy. At home there is quite lot to do. Our buildings are old and they need constant renovation. My wife is working. My son Kaido is studying in an autoschool to be a chauffeur. Daughter Sirje lives in the city of Haapsalu and she is a teacher. At present we are living alone with my wife. Children. of course visit us once in a while. So is the life. When you receive my letter and if you are still living, then write.

To Eduard (age 62); From John (age 81); December 3, 1977

Contextual: It's possible that Grampa is living in the rooming house at this time. The note is written on the back of an August 1977 war pension cheque stub showing an amount of \$33.91. And his signature "John Gallson" is notable.

*Do not have more paper, wish you good health and much luck. **John Gallson.***

To John (age 82); From Eduard (age 63); November 18, 1978

Contextual: Eduard's fear of losing touch with Grampa returned and this is the FIRST mention of a name - **Hilda**. Grampa has been living with Aunt Jean for a year or so and died four months after this letter.

Dear brother:

I am writing to you again, I am living and well, also my wife and son. So here we are living. I am worried why I am not getting any letters from you. Also your daughter from Toronto wrote once and promised to write again. but she has not. What has happened with her? My son wrote two letters in English, so that she would understand. Are the letters lost, or what?

*It would be good to establish ties again between relatives. If you are still alive and well then one could ask. Toronto is not so far from Ottawa. Maybe you could phone her. **Your daughter's name was "Hilda"?** I will finish now. and I wish you all the best and greetings also to Hilda.*

Write to me again to your old homeland.

Waiting for your reply, your brother Eduard.

To Sandra (Aunt Jean's daughter); From Eduard (age 64); July 11, 1979

We received your letter and I am going to answer soon. In your letter we understood that you have misunderstood us. As a fact, we had the letter translated from English, because I myself cannot understand English. We did not wish any money or fortune. I know well enough that my brother was not rich and that he had nothing to leave behind. We only suggested that as my brother had a lot of children and grandchildren you could have gathered some money and bought a small car as a present. It was only a suggestion. We don't know much about your present life and positions and the language problem is the main one. I wonder whether my brother had any photos or something to have as a memory present.

My son is a driver and as you know young people are interested in such things. I am a pensioner and not interested in machines. If you can solve this problem or help us, please write. Don't be angry with us, we are your relatives although we cannot meet. I hope to get a letter soon and please tell us about your life otherwise we know so little about you and we even do not know how many children my brother had, where they are working and living. It is not easy to explain how I felt towards my brother and it is not so important to have any fortune, but to have friendly relatives.

With best wishes, your Granduncle Eduard.

Eduard Õunpuu



Eduard Õunpuu



August Õunpuu

August was Grampa's youngest sibling, born on November 21, 1918 in Mustjala County, Saaremaa, Estonia, five years after Grampa left Estonia for Canada. The birthday is the same day as GG's, so it should have been memorable.

According to Jaak Õunpuu, August's grandson, August lived in Otepää (South Estonia), left his wife Aliide in 1944 and moved to Germany. While August was in Germany, Aliide entered into a new relationship with a Mr. Ajasta. Aliide, wanting to marry Mr. Ajasta, she declared that August was dead. Having no reason to disbelieve her, the family accepted Mr. Ajasta as Aliide's new husband. Aliide kept this secret from her children and grandchildren until around 1964 when they wrote to Aliide to try and find him.

In 1947, August was planning to immigrate from Germany to Canada. To the best of my knowledge he never made it. While in Germany, August was added to a “List of all local residents of the united nations and all other foreigners, German Jews and Stateless Persons”.

In 1955, August was living in Hannover with his German wife and was divorced from her before sending the letter below in November 1957. Jaak reached out to Eduard’s daughter Sirje, to ask for any further information about August, the last they’d heard of him was this letter, three pages of paranoia, suspicion and anger with his ex-wife and with the Germans. Two pages are written on the finest and thinnest tissue paper I’ve ever seen, so thin that the blue pen bleeds through to the other side. The third page, if you can call it that, is a sliver of tissue paper, 2” by 6”. August filled the pages, wrote more along the edges and added more to the top corners.

I had the letter translated and on my next visit to my mother’s in North Bay, I brought it with me. At the time, Mom was married to her second husband, Albin, an Austrian who had reluctantly fought with the Germans in World War II.

I was reading the letter out loud and got to the part where August says “As you already know now the foreigners here are called damned pigdogs.”

“Oh my god, just imagine being called a pigdog,” I said.

“HA!” Albin exclaimed. “Schweinehund!”

“What?” I asked. “What is swinehunt?”

“No - Schweinehund,” Albin said again in his Austrian accent. “Pigdog is schweinehund in German. That’s bad. That is worst thing you can call someone.”

In 1955, Jackie Gallson (Morrison), visited August in Germany while serving in the Canadian Army. How they found each other will remain a mystery because at his current age of 95, Jackie declined to speak with me about his past memories.

To John (age 61); From August (age 49); November 25, 1957, Landstuhl, Germany
Contextual: August is divorced twice with two teenagers, Raimo and Elvi. Raimo is Jaak's father.

Dear brother!

It has been a long time since I write to you. I used to live a good life, but what life I live today, even you, brother, have not experienced.

You know that your son, who was in the military service in Hannover, stayed with me two years ago. He was very kind to me. He gave me cigarettes and tobacco and vodka, but he did not get along with my wife. I know that he does not like the Germans. The "super race" is becoming super again. If the Americans would not be here, there would be a third world war because of the Germans. Yes, brother, this is not all that I wanted to tell you. When your son was here, I was still very stupid and ignorant. Now I know better. Now that I am divorced from my wife. I did not want to divorce, but she did. Prior to our divorce, our life was a continuous fight. I had to use bad language because of the Germans and their "relatives". I cannot remain silent. I know it was because of the last war and the Germans who started it. Now that they are doing well again, they are again grand and arrogant. They have forgotten everything, but not I.

Look forward to your answer. I want to get out of here. If you should have some warm clothing that you no longer need. Would you send them to me to brighten up my Christmas.

You know, brother, I have no reason to live in this country anymore and I don't want to look for another wife since I am so poor as a result of the divorce and taxes. I don't even have any clothes to wear. And I can't buy anything since I have many expenses to pay out of my meagre income. I bought myself a small motorcycle and now I owe still 750 marks and have to pay 100 marks rent a month and I earn only 300 marks a month. My daily food is dry bread, that's all I can afford. I can't live in my previous apartment because in this country, when a woman gets a divorce, she also gets all the furniture and now, poor me, I live in a cold room which I don't like at all -- but where can I go with only a few marks in my pocket. My wife was not faithful to me, she needed other men and I have been a fool to believe that damn German. She was occasionally very nice to me, but it was all a lie and deceit.

I would like to move to you in Canada but I have no money and no prospects ever to get enough for an ocean crossing. I have no clothes, I lost everything through this "beautiful" German. I suffer under hunger and lots of sorrows.

Dear brother, soon it will be Christmas, dear holidays, that I have to spend in my cold room, crying, in a foreign country. There is not a single person I could talk to. Think of me and if possible, send me for Christmas a few

Dollars or some warm winter clothing. Help me, help me. I will repay when I come to Canada. Send me some money for travel expenses.

Brother, I am fighting these damn Germans all alone. Greetings and lots of (?), and I hope you will not leave me here with these damn Germans. I will repay everything when I am there.

Johannes! I have been alone for three months already. I left my old apartment. I made mistake. I could have lived there, but I could not get along with my mother-in-law who lived upstairs; and all the Germans and relatives screaming. As you already know now the foreigners here are called "damned pigdogs". In Germany only the Germans are loved.

I have suffered a lot but what could I do, I have no country. I am not going back home as long as the Russians are still there. I am fighting for freedom and justice for the entire world. Think of me, John, as I sit here in the cold room with a cruel landlady above. Of Jesus, what life I have. Have sympathy with me.

Merry Christmas your brother August

Take care, Johannes, I cannot go to my homeland, there are the "Reds", the Communists!

(small note at top of first page)

You know as father always said, a dog sheds its hair, but not its tone. This is true of the Germans as well.

August Õunpuu



Aliise Õunpuu

Aliise, Grampa's youngest sister, was born in 1911, two years before he left for Canada. She likely had no memory of Grampa. Aliise lived on the family farm, although the original home had burned down. Her letters tell a very sad but hopeful story of the losses and hardships in her life but gradually become quite desperate. Her best friend, Aliide, (this Aliide is a different person than August's wife) immigrated to Desbarats, Ontario which Aliise felt was close to Mattawa when in fact it is a 5-hour drive and closer to Sault Ste. Marie. Aliide eventually takes up the cause of attempting to convince Grampa to send anything he can to help Aliise, whose health continually declines due to a heart condition, mental stress and "accidents".

Unfortunately, I only have letters coming from Aliise and Aliide to Grampa. Aliide's name varies in spelling: Aliide, Alide, Liide.

Mom had also told me that Grampa at one time wanted to sponsor one of his siblings to come to Canada, but Mary forbade it. I initially believed that August was that sibling until I read one of Aliise's letters.

To John (age 62); From Aliide (Aliise's friend in Desbarats, Ontario); January 11, 1958

Dear Juhan:

I am writing this letter because your sister Aliise in Estonia request it. She want you to write to her. She has been a widow for nine years, because her husband is dead. She has a son nine years old and his name is Matty.

This letter is written in English and Aliide includes Aliise's address.

To John (age 62); From Aliise (age 47); June 26, 1958

Greetings from Homeland

*I received your letter on 24th, that is on St. John's Day. Your letter was easy to understand, it was written just as we speak. **I remember your letters from old.** I believe those were not written as well as your writings now. Have you been meeting more Estonians, there is more of them anywhere in the world than before. If you could understand my letter as well as I understand yours, then we could tell each other everything. There is so much to tell but it is still hard to know what to write. For so many years we did not know anything about each other.*

*Eduard wrote once that he had written to your old address and had received a reply. I did not have your address because **all old letters burned with the house.** I don't know where Eduard kept that address, through the wartime.*

You may not know that our home burned down long ago. Father lived alone, I was in Vohma. Later my husband's home also burned down. We fixed those old buildings so we could have some kind of roof for shelter. Last spring was 8 years since father's death and this fall it will be 8 years since my husband Oskar died. He got infected with TB as prisoner-of-war and died. My oldest children would be grownups now, if they had survived. Daughter Virve, born 1936, died at age 8. Son Vello, born 1939, died when 7 years old. Next child was a son, born 3 Jan 1949. Matti was 10 months old when Oskar died. Life was very hard. I had lost everything in the fires, there was nothing in the shops. Nevertheless I was still healthy and able to earn money, until because of the accidents and worries my health was affected. At the present time I cannot work can barely walk. Life for a single person is not easy in any country, although you can manage somehow as long as you are healthy. Now I don't really know how to cope.

My son is still small, is attending school and needs for that proper clothes -- it did not matter what he was wearing when he was at home. But the Scripture says not to worry about tomorrow, there's sufficient worry already today. And thank God we have not been hungry.

Since childhood was my best friend Lubjakivi Liide. Fate separated us so that we never again see each other. Liide has written to me that if she had your address she would ask her children to write to you in English, in case you have forgotten Estonian. She also wrote that she does not live very far from you and, if you don't mind, would like to visit you sometime. They own two cars.

I would be very happy if she would visit you. If so, then please welcome her like your own sister because she is my best friend and since we never meet in person, greet her as you would greet me. She is well informed of my life in case you are interested. You would also find out from her how they assist their relatives in the old country if they can afford it and love their relatives.

How big is your family now? I would like to get a family picture for you. I see other people getting photos of their relatives. I cannot send one of myself

since I do not have one but will do so in future. Liide sent me a picture last summer.

I will finish now hoping that you will understand my writing. Best greetings to you and yours, be they your wife or children, greet them all for your sister.

Expecting your reply, sister Aliise

Aliise notes that Grampa's Estonian writing has improved since his "letters from old", which is interesting. Also, the reason why there are no older letters is that they were destroyed in the house fire.

To John (age 62); From Aliise (age 47); July 28, 1958 (truncated)

Today is Sunday and the Confirmation Day at Mustjala.

I was asking if you own a house.

*I have more questions. **I remember that your first wife went mad and was taken to an asylum. Did she have to stay there or did she recover, and is she still alive? I remember you had another woman (wife?) who sent me in a letter a pocket handkerchief. Are all your children by one wife or are some by the other one?***

I used to be rather slim but have been getting heavier because of heart disease. This is not real fat, is more like bloating which I notice mainly because my feet and legs are sometimes so swollen.

Eduard has only 2 children, Julius was never married and has no children. I know nothing about August; he had 2 children, his wife lives on mainland. Is your wife still around or are you a widower?

Greetings Aliise and Mati.

This was thought-provoking. Perhaps the stories of Mary not allowing Grampa to connect with his Estonian family was all wrong. Mary sent a handkerchief in a letter to Aliise.

To John (age 63); From Aliide (Aliise's friend); Undated but 1957/58, before Feb 1959; slightly truncated.

Hello and Happy New Year

Several months have passed since I received your letter. Meanwhile I have obtained from your sister Alice 3 letters. Last summer I sent her some clothing and saccharin. She was very grateful for it. Saturday I got a letter from her again. Her health is very poor.

My father's cousin Lusu has sent her from Sweden a pair of shoes and to her son Matti a pair of boots. Brother Julius, I hear is presently seriously ill. His right side is paralyzed and he is unable to talk.

Brother Eduard has visited him. Maybe that Eduard has already written to you about it. As for Alice writing is difficult as she has no money. Every letter needs some expense. Alice your sister is grateful to the people who help her raise her son. Alice herself is so ill that desires to die although she has a 10 year old son who needs clothing and food and parents and mother's love. His father rests long time in grave.

Perhaps you also found it possible to help your sister a little. She is really in very difficult position. She was very diligent and brave person when she was healthy. But serious illness has brought the situation that she has to ask help from other people. We have lived here in Canada now nearly 8 years. It is really very nice to live here. We have sent to Estonia textile packages and money to my mother as well as to my husband's mother. For instance if you send from here \$1, then they receive in Estonia for it 10 rubels, for \$50 they get 500 rubels which is their big money. To send money is easier than to send a package. The package requires more expense. Please forgive me that I write to you about your sister. I beg you, if it is possible at all, please send something to your sister Alice as here is everything available. Many greetings, Adu's daughter,

Aliide Ader, your sister Alice's close friend.

To John (age 62); From Aliise (age 47), September 26, 1958

Dear Brother:

I received your letter a few days ago. I have to go to the city and see the doctors again, and so I thought to write a few lines and take the letter to the post office. I will also write to Liide.

Liide sent a parcel to her mother and she had enclosed a few things for me. A kerchief, material for a blouse and stockings, and for the boy a nice piece of

material for a blouse or shirt. Also for me some saccharin. There should have been 2 kerchiefs, however the parcel was rather small, somebody else was posting it for her, there were more items for another family included -- as a result my second kerchief did not get sent.

Liide is a wonderful person and a very good friend. She has her own family, three children are still attending school, one daughter is married, one son and her husband are working. She was planning to send her own son's used clothing to my son, however that is no more possible and you can't send those clothes to me.

With help from other people, I was able to make enough hay so that I can keep the cow for another year. It's time for potato harvesting. My health is right now so poor and if it not improves, I will not be able to do the job and potatoes will stay in earth (ground). My son is again attending school and lives in Vohma with grandmother and aunt. He visits occasionally, otherwise I am all alone. My health is worsening with every year, who knows how long I will last. I worry because of the boy although I would not mind for myself if death would come -- everyday hardships and worries have tired me but the boy is still so young.

Best wishes to you all -- sister Liise

To John (age 62); From Aliide (Aliise's friend); October 5, 1958 (truncated)

Many greetings from homeland Estonia from sister Alice.

I apologize for bothering you. I am an absolute stranger to you. But my birthplace and your birthplace were neighbours. I knew your father, your mother and all your brothers and sisters. Maybe that you remember "Lubjikiru", Adu and Lusud. I am their daughter. I grew up with your sister Alice. Your sister asks, if at all possible, to write her a letter. Your sister married from Ushma [village name] with Oskar from Aigu [another village name]. They had 3 children, 2 are dead, 1 lives with her and is 9 years old. Alice's mother-in-law who is 63 years old helps to raise her child as your sister has been 8 years widowed and has been last 4 to 5 years really in sickbed. She is suffering heart trouble, so is not capable to work. Your sister Alice lives presently in that house which used to be your mother's home. "Nudi" houses [apparently father's home] burned all down when your father was still alive.

Aliide Adar

To John (age 63); From Alide (Aliise's friend), February 10, 1959

Hallo friend,

I have received your letter and money and I thank you very much. I have forwarded it to your sister Alice in your name. I am also returning the banks receipt to you. With the receipt you should get reduction from income tax (this word maybe I spelled wrong) as I am not yet able to write in English. When you send from here to father or mother, they reduce your income tax, but I am not sure in the case of sister.

Your wish in your letter was very nice, but I am afraid, it cannot be fulfilled. Your sister Alice is ill, the doctors will not permit her to travel and Matti will not be permitted to leave by Russian authorities. I did write about your wish to your sister Alice. I am sure she knows herself better whether Matti can leave the country. I hope that she writes you soon herself. But if you would be so kind as to send her something in future. If you cannot mail it yourself, then I can help you to do it. We cannot mail parcels from here, it must be done in Toronto.

Our parcels are mailed by my brother in Toronto. I send the packages to him for mailing. I hope that when money is received by your sister Alice she will write to you herself.

Many thanks again for the money for your sister and many greetings are sent by your sister Alice's (girl)friend.

Alide Ader & family.

To John (age 63); From Aliise (age 48), March 20, 1959

Dear Brother:

It's been a while since I last wrote to you and still more time since I got a letter from you. I was expecting a letter when I received the money that you had sent but in vain. If Aliide had not written, I would not have known who sent the money. Thank you ever so much for remembering me.

***Aliide wrote to me that you would like to invite us to join you.** This plan will not work because it is not possible to get out from here and also -- what would I be doing there. I am not able to work and you yourself are an aged man who may end up feeding us eventually. And I don't believe I would survive the trip, I throw up on the bus going to the city on some days, and also the distance and troubles in connection with documents. It would also be very expensive. I rather think if you can afford it and have enough love, to assist me here a little. It would be simple to send money, however the exchange is so*

unfavorable that a parcel would be much more useful. I have heard that customs and postage are expensive but the contents of the parcel would be cheaper.

So if you really are able and willing to assist me, I would advise you to send some money to Aliide who then would prepare and send the parcel. She has friends who send her parcels for her because parcel office is very far from her and also from your home. Aliide wrote that her first parcel was returned because she was not familiar with the proper procedure and office.

It is a question of trust to involve other people but I am positive that they are honest people and Aliide is my dear friend. I am sure she would come and help me personally right now if we were not separated by this distance.

We are like strangers, have never met each other or maybe when I was a year old baby when you left home and now it seems as if a stranger were asking for charity. And yet we are children of the same father and mother.

I feel sorry for Julius who ruined his life. He started to drink so heavily that lost even his clothes. Twice he was paralysed but recovered, last fall he was paralysed for the third time and now he cannot move or talk, only his mind is intact. Eduard wrote that had visited him and when Eduard talked about home and family, he had cried like a baby. He used to promise to help me because I had looked after and eventually buried father and mother; but drink took everything that he had.

I don't know if you understand my words or have forgotten Estonian - but I am still hopeful.

Best wishes to you all far away.

Sister Aliise.

Julius was born June 12, 1904 and would have been nine when Grampa left for Canada.

To John (age 63); From Aliise (age 48); May 27, 1959

Dear Brother

I got your letter some time ago and have not answered until now. I have not heard from Aliide for a long time. I wonder if the letter has got lost, she was always such a good letter writer.

I have no news to write since you don't know anybody from around here anymore and there are very few people left who remember you.

I spent the month of April in the city in the hospital. My health shows no improvement, the disease is not killing me but I cannot do anything. Potatoes are planted, other people helped, I just more or less organized. What about your land, are you growing any crops -- at least potatoes?

For the money that you sent I received 204 Rubles and a 3-week-old pig cost 250 Rubles, so I added a little and got myself a pig.

It is not practical to plan a move from here to there. I have heard that some children have invited their parents and the parents have actually gone. But there is lots of red tape to get the documents. And my boy is still so young, what would we do in a foreign country, not knowing the language, school not finished. Situation here is such that if I am totally unable to do it, the state will bring him up and look after his education, they will not let you to starve to death. All in all, healthy people manage pretty well. There is no unemployment in this country, another thing is how much anybody earns. Worst of all is still the life of an old Kolkhoz member although even some Kolkhozes have been improvement in their living standard, especially the ones with fertile soil. A person whose health does not allow him to work will find life (to be) miserable everywhere and in every country.

I will finish for now and with all the best

Sister Aliise

It would seem that contrary to stories my mother told, it was Aliise herself who refused to come to Canada and possibly had nothing to do with Mary. Grandpa sent Aliise \$20 and it's amazing that she only had to top that up by a small amount to buy a pig.

To John (age 63; From Aliide (Aliise's friend); Undated but after June 1959.

I am sending greetings on behalf of your sister Alice Tahtvali. Your sister Alice is at her home in Estonia in very, very serious poverty. Please if it is at

all possible, send her something – some clothing, food or money. She lacks everything ? as her girlfriend have sent her some small items.

But I lost my husband this summer. My husband was killed on 4th of June accidentally. He was logging wood from the forest where he was overrun by tractor. He was not covered by insurance of any kind. Now I cannot spare any money for sending parcels as it is difficult to make the ends meet for myself. I am enclosing some addresses which are the agencies for sending parcels. If you manage to support your sister. Her address is ...

Sincerely your sisters girlfriend Aliide Ader

This was the last letter from Aliide.

To John (age 64); From Aliise (age 49); August 30, 1960

Greetings, Brother John:

It's been a while since I last wrote to you. So I am writing once more today.

Are you still alive and healthy. We are still surviving although my health is all gone and it is very difficult to get along with everyday life. I will have to give up the cow because I am no longer able to look after it. I don't know how and how long my life is going to last and who is going to look after my son. He is still too young, only 11 years old. I have lost touch with other brothers, it's more than a year since Eduard last wrote. I wrote a letter today also to him.

With Aliide Ader am I in continual correspondence. She has sent me a few gifts. Just recently when she sent some money to her mother there was a little something also for me.

I have managed until now with the help of my son; now the school term is starting, this is going to be fifth year for him. Time will tell how I am going to get by without him.

I have nothing else to write. You know nothing about our life here, even I am a stranger to you although you may have heard that somewhere far away there is a sister. People who left here later remember common acquaintances about who one could write, you don't know anybody from around here.

Thus, I will finish with best wishes to you all.

Your sister Aliise

Grampa had been notified six months earlier that GG had passed away at St. Thomas Hospital

To John (age 66); From Aliise (age 51); February 25, 1962

Dear Brother:

Again a lot of time has passed since my last letter. I wonder if you are still alive and well. We are still carrying on. Mati is at school and I am always alone at home. My health is not improving but rather worsening. That is why I had a certain idea. It is difficult for me to put it in words, but as the saying goes -- necessity knows no law.

You have earlier written that you would be able to bring up Mati if he were there with you. Then I had the idea that maybe you could send some money or a parcel to him here. It's obviously impossible for the boy to move there. You yourself are not young anymore and earning money would not be as easy as before, nevertheless you might still be able to send some assistance to him here. Your own children are already wage earners and may be of help even to you when needed.

I am a stranger to you, even in your letters you address me with the unfamiliar "teie" instead of "sina", yet I am your sister.

I don't worry about myself, I rarely go out and at home it does not matter what kind of rags I am wearing, but Mati attends school and needs to dress more or less like others, and that is above my ability. If I were able to work, there would be no problem because the stores have all kinds of merchandise, all you need is money. In case you are able and loving to send me some assistance but find it difficult to do, you could send it to my friend Aliide who would forward it to me.

I know nothing of brother Julius, is he alive or dead. Eduard lives still on Hiiumaa, sent me a New Year's gift of 10 Rubles.

I will conclude with greetings and best wishes. I hope my letter will find you all in good health. Good-bye for now and maybe forever.

With greetings sister Aliise.

To John (age 68); From Aliise (age 53); January 30, 1964

Dear Brother:

I don't remember anymore how long it is since I last wrote to you. Are you still alive and healthy?

We here are somehow getting by. Mati has been ill. He had problems with his lungs. Spent a long time in hospital in Tallinn and later in a sanitarium. He is now back and healthy and attends school at Vohma.

I am just like before and unable to work. I spent most of last winter in hospital. This winter has been somewhat better but only with the help of medicine.

Now I have a wish for you. If possible, although I know that you are old, but working conditions over there are better and you have many children who are all working. Could you send me a little money. Over there everybody is riding in cars and I would like to buy a bike for my boy. Prices are about 60 Rubles. Maybe you could send me 50 Dollars. Value of Rubles and Dollars right now is about the same. Dollar is a little cheaper than Ruble, but the difference is very small. I would add to that amount so we could make the purchase. We need that bike badly and I don't have enough money for that.

If you are sending it then use Post office; enclosed in letters it will get lost and even if it arrives, it still has to be exchanged in the bank. I would be very grateful if you could do this. I have heard that other people are sending parcels to their relatives quite often. The problem with parcels is the very high customs payment, sending money is cheaper. Lately people have started to send money because it is possible to make the purchases here. Wage earners can buy whatever they need, only people like me who cannot work have to ask help from other people.

This winter the weather has been warm like in spring. We have very little snow and it is not cold.

Has August written to you and from where did he write last time? His children would like to know where he is. These children are now grown, the boy is doing his military service and the girl is also more than 20 years old.

Greetings and best of luck to you all.

Sister with her son.

Comparing the letters Grampa sent to my mother to the letters he sent to his brother in Estonia, something became clear. There is a different feeling in the letters to Eduard — an emotional distance and an obligation to communicate. To my mother, he showed loneliness and vulnerability.

Aliise Õunpuu



Juulius Õunpuu



An Unexpected Guest

We were a broken-hearted family when my niece, Christine, died from cancer in 2004. She was only 30. About a year later, my sister, Carol, received a call from a friend who had been to a group medium reading. The friend said the medium told her she had a friend who had lost a child recently and Carol was the only friend that fit the description. The medium said to pass along a message that the child wanted to communicate and that the child's mother needed to find a medium.

Carol made an appointment with Sandra Wiltshire in Georgetown who claimed to have developed the ability to communicate with entities on the "other side" after her own daughter had suddenly died. Carol asked me and our sister to come with her.

It was an experience none of us will forget.

Sandra wasn't given any information about us, except Carol's name. She had no idea why we were there or with whom we were looking to communicate. But the entity that "took over" the session and orchestrated the communication was someone, sadly, we weren't expecting or even thinking about at the time.

It was one of those amazing moments for me because prior to this I believed that GG was a stranger to me. I didn't know her personality - how could I? But the woman described by Sandra who came forward was someone we could easily recognize. She was a mix of the personalities of my mother, my Uncle Phill and my Aunt Jean - chatty, pushy, extroverted, confident.

The following is an excerpt from the transcript:

I feel like there's somebody who's had some trouble with their head that's here as well? Head hurts. My head is hurting here. And it's inside the head as opposed to an accident or a hit on the head. More inside. I feel like, on your Mom's side of the family. I feel I have your Gramma, on your Mom's side. She's very strong, OK? She's making me feel like she's going to help.

Gramma is trying to pull somebody forward.

If I make the assumption that mediums, and people with psychic abilities, are genuine, then this is key. When I first heard this, it actually made me feel that Sandy was perhaps disingenuous because at the time I wanted to believe that my grandmother was not mentally insane, but was put into a mental asylum by my grandfather for other reasons. However, if GG spiralled into manic psychosis, then she would definitely be indicating that something was wrong “inside the head.”

Is your father passed? (Carol: yes) He’s here and not coming forward. OK, I’m hoping that your grandmother will bring him, but it’s your grandmother on your Mom’s side, not your grandmother on your Dad’s side. He’s there though and your grandmother’s going to bring him.

I don’t know if she [Mom] was moving closer to you [Carol], or there was something about that, I feel like you worry about this because you can’t go see her as much. Your grandmother says let that go too. Cause she’s right there. And your Mom talks to her. So your Mom knows, OK. Whether she knows or not, but it’s like she comes in her sleep and she’s acknowledging that as well.

Cause I see boxes around her, so your grandmother has followed her and it’s OK, alright. But she’s still getting up and going, cause she’s not laying in a bed anywhere, she says, she feels like she’s a go-getter. OK, you know at her age, you know what a go-getter means. She’s making me feel like she doesn’t sit idly. She’s glad of that and gives her the thumbs up on that. She’s making me feel like your mother is fairly well, doing the best she can at her age. And your grandmother knows that. She very much hugs her and extends out to her.

She was sick, eh? Your daughter? ‘Cause we’re not talking car accident here. And her blood was sick, is what I’m being told by your grandmother. Where her blood wasn’t right. Do you understand? (Carol: positive response) Your grandmother was there to get her too. You need to know that. I think your Dad too. Your Dad passed before your daughter. (Carol: positive response) Well, he’s sitting in this chair, so your grandmother is taking over and that’s OK.

Later in the session, Sandra said when referring to the man in the chair, “There’s an “L”.... Like a Leonard maybe? Or Lloyd?”

My father’s name was Lloyd.

It was only upon reflection while listening to the audio recording months later, that I remembered one of the many visits with Mom in her condo in North Bay prior to our session with Sandra. Mom and I were getting ready for bed and before she closed her bedroom door

she said, “You know I talk to my mother, at night before I go to sleep, I talk to her.” At the time I thought it was sweet and nothing more.

Union Cemetery, Union, Ontario

At a time when driving with a GPS was still new, I joined my sisters with our Mom on a trip to Union, Ontario, in search of GG’s grave. Carol had received information as to the exact location of the plot.

Mom and Uncle Phill had been here years prior and had found their mother’s grave but Mom always doubted whether she could ever find it again and only had a blurry memory of it being under a sapling. She remembered the marking stone being flat and mostly covered with overgrowth which they had dug out, cleaned off and placed on top of the ground.

We were all keeping a sharp eye on our surroundings as Carol’s Garmin GPS led us left then right, down unpaved roads lined with massive trees. Finally, the road abruptly ended, the GPS announcing we had arrived.

All four of us stared out the car windows, completely surrounded on three sides by large trees and nothing more.

It was evident that following the GPS had led us down a wrong road and as we debated how far we needed to backtrack, Mom exited the car and disappeared inside the trees. We followed her into a massive field decorated with evenly spaced flower bunches and small statues.

Mom pointed and walked towards a huge tree in the middle. We could hardly keep up with her. She knelt down and meticulously began pulling weeds and removing overgrowth from the grave of someone she hadn’t seen since she was five years old. The true meaning of a pauper’s grave was sobering and sad. The four-word inscription spoke volumes. A small concrete slab impressed with Flora Gallson 1897 1960.

This would be as close as I would ever get to my grandmother. We talked about moving her grave closer to North Bay where Mom could visit more often and buying a nicer headstone. In the end, my mother resisted the idea of disturbing her mother’s peace.



Conclusions

In the beginning, I wanted answers about why my grandmother was sent to a mental institution and left there to suffer and die. I admit that I was angry about it and in my mind I knew who the culprits were – my grandfather with his co-conspirator, The Old Lady.

After researching and pulling apart the stories surrounding these three people, I have changed my dogmatic and judgemental conclusions. It is impossible for me to push together into a neat and tidy ball the events of 1929. They are totally separate issues.

GG may have found out she was pregnant in early 1929. With a growing family, they decided to abandon the US Naturalization process and E-J Tannery and Shoe Company in favour of a small parcel of Canadian land. Children and land ownership was a sign of “wealth” in my grandfather’s eyes.

In October 1929, the Great Depression hit North America and unexpectedly GG’s fourth pregnancy went terribly wrong. Why would she suddenly be unable to carry a pregnancy to full term? What cannot be ignored is that she may also have been carrying fraternal twins, a gene that is still being carried by descendants today.

In early 2024, for personal and private medical reasons, my brother Wayne had his genetics tested for a different gene. The COL11A1 autosomal gene, one that determines the strength and structure of collagen in the body. The appearance of the variant was extremely interesting and came with a diagnosis of Stickler Syndrome.

While the diagnosis answered present day questions for my brother’s family, it also pulled back a veil in GG’s family history. The premature death of GG’s brother Philip Peters, and the cause of death of Phyllis’s baby, Philip Thorpe, could very well be connected to this syndrome.

Another symptom of Stickler is skeletal height. GG’s immigration documents indicate that she was 5’ 1”, which is below average even though that’s the same height as me. When I shared this with my British cousin, he remembered Aunt Edie, GG’s sister, was only 4’ 11”.

Collagen is also present in the tissues of the membranes of the cervix and holds a pregnancy in place. In rare cases, Stickler can cause this membrane to be structurally fragile causing the normal fluctuations of estrogen and progesterone to severely alter and strain these tissues. If GG were pregnant with twins, the extra pressure on the placental membrane would have been exacerbated by Stickler Syndrome.

Between 1926 and 1929, without pre- and post-natal care, the mortality rate of premature babies was relatively high. This could very well be the memory that all three children, under the age of six, have of their mother being taken away in an ambulance. Aunt Jean remembered a stretcher, Mom remembered a nurse, Uncle Phill remembered white coats. Mom was slapped by GG when she crawled into bed with her shoes on. This may seem like a small detail, but if Mom had her shoes on, the incident happened during a time when GG should not have been in bed and is not a place someone would be when in a manic psychosis state.

It is these musings that make me wonder – what was really going on?

In July and August of 2026, the news headlines were filled with the trial of Lindsay Clancy, a woman who suffering from *manic psychosis* murdered her *three children* and wanted to *kill herself*. This sounded all too familiar to me.

Witnesses describe Lindsay as a great, doting and loving mother. But after her third child, she struggled mentally, was under psychiatric care, and took many different prescribed medications. Through it all, she heard voices telling her to kill her children.

The defense argued that she wasn't criminally responsible because she had *bipolar disorder* and was suffering from postpartum *psychosis*, a rare condition that affects a new mom's sense of reality. This is from a CBC News online article published September 1, 2026. The whole thing ended in a mistrial after one juror had reasonable doubt but couldn't bring himself to side with the defense.

A landmark case of Andrea Yates in Texas in 2001 who strived to be a perfect mother, drowned her five children “plagued by delusions that her immoral mothering had doomed her... children to eternal damnation.” She wanted to be executed so Satan would die with

her. Twenty-five years later, Andrea is still in a mental institution, refusing to apply for release.

It is heartbreaking that almost one hundred years have passed, and yet, women are still suffering, no — tortured, by this. This postpartum condition is rare and little understood today. So what did they understand at a time when postpartum was not even a concept in the 1929 medical community?

During my visit with Aunt Hilda, she told me Grampa went to see GG when he disappeared in the late 1940s, which would have been after she was transferred to St. Thomas in 1945. If GG was “too far gone” when Uncle Phill inquired about visiting her, she was likely in the same rough shape when Grampa went. Her state of being would shock him. Did she recognize him, and if so, what did she say to him?

Did her condition fill him with such guilt that he agreed to pay for her expenses that he knew he couldn’t afford and could never pay? There would be consequences to the hospital knowing where to find him. Public hospital insurance in Ontario did not come into effect until 1957. In my mind, this answers the question of why he disappeared for two years into the bush and why he became “silent” and “absent”.

“I was sure surprised to hear from you,” Grampa wrote in a letter to Mom while he was in hiding. He knew Mom had a reason to be upset with him for something.

There are many questions to which I will never find answers, but I have to conclude that my grandfather lost control of GG’s situation as soon as she threatened to kill the children and herself. It was so cut and dry in the early 1900s — threatening the lives of your children crossed the line. GG, knowingly, saved the lives of her three children by calling herself out. Today, authorities are so reluctant to take and keep a mother from her children. Families are kept together at all costs but the cost many times is too high.

There’s no denying that the repercussions of the actions of a desperate father of three toddlers in 1929, to move forward and carry on, changed the outcome of many lives forever and the ripples are still being felt by the generations that came after. It is a sad relief for me to admit he had no good choices. What GG suffered was not his fault, nor was it Mary’s. GG became a victim of a budding mental health care system.

Mary's conduct during those years is a separate story. She was also a victim of her family's circumstances, upbringing and situation. She also acted out of desperation to save herself and her children.

One More Thing...

GG's name-change from Florence to Flora which must have been influenced by my grandfather since the change happened after they married.

Amongst the pictures once belonging to my grandfather was a random cropped portrait of a soldier by the name of E. Nelson. The front of the photo also indicated he may have been from Winnipeg by the writing "Wpg. Can". On the back is written "Sapper E. Nelson 237".

I kept the photo over the decades, always looking at it wondering what clues I might miss if I ever threw it away. There was a reason why Grampa had this picture and kept it.

The first clue was the "sapper" part. Grampa was a sapper too but there were a lot of sappers. What made E. Nelson special?

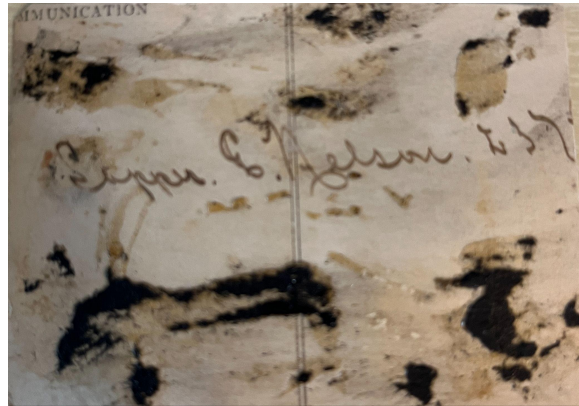
I searched through the WWI online databases for E. Nelson with "237" in the regimental numbers and found him.

Edward Nelson, Regimental number 2378872. He was born in South Dakota but his address was Winnipeg, Manitoba. His medical log indicated he'd been in the hospital with Grampa in England suffering from VDG (venereal disease) and he was on the S.S. Columbia on December 14, 1918 with Grampa on his return to Canada. Edward and Grampa had become close friends.

There was another "coincidence" that caught my eye. Edward Nelson's mother's name was Florence.

Florence was born in 1875 so I checked through the census and found her when she was five years old with her family.

They called her Flora.



Back of photo

Appendix

Combined Timeline

DATE	JOHN	FLORENCE	MARY
1896 - Nov 13 or Nov 25	Born officially Nov 25 (after 13 days added in 1918 to adjust to Gregorian calendar), Pahapilli, Mustjala Co., Saaremaa Island, Estonia. Oldest child. Parents: Mihkel & Leen		
1897-Nov-21		Born 3 Martin Street, Paddington, Kensington, London, England. Parents: Joseph & Hannah. Older siblings Joseph & Ellen.	
1903-Jan-04		Twin siblings Edith and Philip born	
1905-Apr-30		Sibling: Albert born	
1907-Mar-09		Sibling: Philip dies - age 4	
1910-Feb-18		Father: Joseph Henry Peters dies - age 46 - cancer	
1910-Sep-06			Born, Kirkfield, Ontario
1913-Jun-13	Departed Glasgow, Scotland, SS Columbia to New York, Age 17, destination "CPR - Chapleau"		
1913-Jun-16	Arrived Ellis Island, NYC; \$25 cash; friend Johannes Lonn, Chapleau.		
1914-Jan-31		"Sibling": Phyllis Vera Peters born (father unknown)	
1915 Sept.	WW1	Germany bombs central	

DATE	JOHN	FLORENCE	MARY
		<i>London</i>	
1916-Mar-10	Enlisted Webbwood, ON; age 19 as John Gaallson; 119th Overseas Battalion. Badge # 754360, Lumber Jack, weight 155, Religion: RC, Height 5' 9", Fair, Light Blue eyes, Fair hair		
1916-Aug 8 to Aug 19	Sailed from Halifax to Liverpool with 119th Battalion on SS Metagama		
1916-Oct 2 to 26	Hospitalized with Mumps/Parotitis & Rubella (German Measles), Military Hospital, Aldershot. Signed military will to Miss Gladys Hall, London.		
1916-Nov 28 to Dec 5	119th Proceeded to France; he was transferred to 52nd Battalion Canadian Expeditionary Force		
1917-Dec & Jan	Hospitalized about two months. V.D.G. [Venereal Disease Gonorrhea]		
1917-Feb-12	Rejoined 52nd Battalion unit		
<i>1917-Mar 10 to Apr 3</i>	<i>52nd Batt'n, billeted in Villers au Bois onto "line"; from Bruay back to Villers au Bois; to the front line; raiding enemy trenches, emptying "saps"</i>		
<i>1917-Apr-09</i>	<i>Attack on Vimy Ridge; Sometime here, 52nd Batt'n headed to Ypres, Belgium (Battle of Passchendaele)</i>		
1917-Oct-26	Shrapnel Wound to head, Brielen; Brielen to Bethune		

DATE	JOHN	FLORENCE	MARY
1917-Oct-29	Admitted Eastbourne - DeWalden Court - Hospital [Shrapnel Wound] head 26 X 17, bone just grooved, [bone fragment] removed, Wound looks clean.		
1917-Nov-04	Cable 12/4 M.6294 - Notified Next of Kin, Wound of Right Mid-parietal region, large enough to hold a pigeon's egg. Bottom of wound slightly sloughy, sides healthy. Filled up with Bipp. [Bismuth iodoform paraffin paste], Man heavy & slow of speech, does not complain of headache. Eye movements of pupils normal, discharged following day		
1917-Nov 10 to Dec 12	Two rounds (500 units) Anti Tetanus Serum; wound healing rapidly under BIPP: allowed to go out, wound has healed up nicely: this man is of Scandinavian origin and slow in understanding English which makes him appear at times to be mentally dull.		
1917-Dec-13	Discharged from Red X Hosp. Shrapnel Wound Head - site healed, 38 days in hospital		
1917-Dec 14 to Dec 21	Can Gen Hosp Eastbourne, Sussex, Transferred from V.A.D. Hosp. - Bexhill, Quite Recovered; Posted to a "casualty company" and granted a "sub[sistence] allowance of 80¢ per diem from 17-12-1918 to 3-1-19 Home coming furlough," because his pay had been forfeited so often.		

DATE	JOHN	FLORENCE	MARY
	Discharge 4 days later.		
1918-Mar-04	Admission to Canadian Hospital, Etchinghill, Lyminge - [Venereal Disease Gonorrhea] - primary Syphilis; Disease contracted at London; Primary sore appeared; Placed on Syphilis Register		
1918-Mar 4 to Nov 24	1st Canadian Convalescent Depot & Canadian Hospital, Etchinghill, Lyminge; Full course treatment: Multiple Intravenous Diarsenol, Intramuscular injections, Metallic Mercury, Galyd. 114 days in hospital total. Discharged as cured.		
1918-Dec-07	Sailed for Canada on SS Olympic, Rank: Spr [sapper]		
1919-Jan-07	Discharged on Demobilization; tattoo reg. #119 on Lt. arm, scar on forearm & scalp		
1919-Jun-10	arrived in Buffalo, NY; claims DOB is Nov 13, 1896 via Grand Trunk Railway; address: 1320 Water Street, Wheeling, West Virginia; last foreign residence: Toronto		
undated	Index card with John's US Military number on it. Adah, Fayette, PA, USA		
1920-Jan-30		Departs Liverpool with "Miss Taylor Party" Overseas Settlement Committee. S. S. Metagama	
1920-Feb-10		Arrives in St. John, New Brunswick. Domestic; she has \$5.00; Mother's address: 42A St. Mary's Road, London	

DATE	JOHN	FLORENCE	MARY
1920-Oct-25		Crosses border from Canada to Buffalo. Destination: Lester F. Gilbert (lawyer), 115 Lexington Ave., Buffalo as domestic; Height: 5' 1"; she has \$60	
1920-Dec-16	Declaration of Intention - USA Naturalization Service; District Court of US, Wheeling West, Virginia; address: 1320 Water Street, Wheeling, West Virginia; Enlistment Record; US Army #6476877 - Pt. - took travel pay, enlisted for 3 years; Ft. Thomas, Campbell Co., KY; \$142.25 + bonus \$90.00; Howitzer Co.		
1921-Jan-14	U.S. Army doc: Permanent marks and physical defects; Vaccinations: Typhoid, paratyphoid; Others: Lt Arm Tattoo 119, Rt Back [birthmark] 1/2" [diameter]; Wheeling, WV; Friend: Mrs. Nora Tucker, R.F.D.1, Mystic, Georgia		
1921-Feb 1 and Mar 11	Promoted twice: RMB Pvt (Put) and PMB Pvt 1cl (Put)		
1921-Jul-09	Honorable Discharge from US Army, 6th Infantry, Howitzer Co., camp Jackson, SC, USA; Reason: reduction of army; character: excellent; Address: 1320 Water St., Wheeling, West Virginia		
1921-Oct-24		Crosses border from Buffalo to Canada, address is Hotel Biltmore, NYC. Destination: Mrs. Draper, 88 Scollard St., Toronto; she has \$100	

DATE	JOHN	FLORENCE	MARY
1921-Nov-15	Change of address 165 East 128th St., New York, NY, USA ; Name change to Gallson		
1922-Mar-07	Marriage to Florence M. Peters, age 25, Manhattan, NY; address: RFD#1, Pate[r]son, NJ, USA [Rural Fire Department #1]	Marriage to John Gallson. Address: Hotel Lorraine, 5th & 55th Ave., NYC	
1923-Jan-10	Jeanette Ellen born; baptized April 15, 1923 St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Waterville, Maine		
1923-Jun	Living in Florida, possibly Collinsville Camp, near Miami		
1923-July	Living in Zolfo Springs, FL		
1924-Nov-25	US Dept of Lab letter requesting \$1.00 fee for copy of Declaration of Intention for Naturalization; Address: Zolfo Springs, Florida		
1925-Jan-04	Joan Vera born	Wauchula, Harding Co., Florida	
1926-Mar-18	Phillip John born	Zolpho Springs, Harding Co., Florida	
1927-Apr-06	Letter from US Dept of Labour, to Zolfo Springs, Florida; acknowledging \$1.00 received for copy of Naturalization Intention; advising to be prompt as a deadline of December 16, 1927 the petition for naturalization would expire.		
1927-Dec-16	<i>Expiry date of petition for naturalization</i>		
1928-Apr-11	Listed with Flora in directory of Endicott - Endicott, NY; Occ: tanner; address 200 North		
1929-Apr-12	Listed Flora M. in directory of Endicott, NY; Occ: shoeworker; address: 206 North		
1929-May-23	Bought parcel of land Trout Mills, Ontario		
1929-Jul-09	Crossed border to Canada, destination Trout Mills, Ontario		
1929-Jul-15	Registered Trout Mills property at Land Titles office		

DATE	JOHN	FLORENCE	MARY
1929-Oct-24	<i>Stock Market Crash - The Great Depression begins</i>		
1929-Nov			Jackie conceived, Oshawa, Ontario
1929-Dec-21	Florence entered into the population of New Toronto Mental Asylum		
1929-Dec to 1930-Jan	Jean, Joan & Phill are disbursed to temporary homes; Mary (2mo pregnant) & 2-yr-old son Donald move in with John and children		Mary forced into abortion arrangement (Oshawa). Answers ad in newspaper for domestic. Arranges to meet John in hotel in Toronto with all children. They drive back to Trout Mills together. Both find work at chicken farm.
1930-July	\$6.00 levy for road maintenance, Trout Mills.		
1930-Aug-08			Jackie born, Trout Mills.
1930-Dec	\$9.00 levy for road maintenance		
1930-Feb-15			Jimmy Gallson conceived, Trout Mills
1931-Jun-01	Widdifield Census: Jean 8, Joan 6, Phillip 5		Mary is "homemaker", Donald 3, Jackie 1 (is Jackie is actually 10 mo.)
1931-Aug-01	Harvey Burrows, merchant registers "interest" in property in agreement of a mortgage		
1931-Aug-12	Advertises farm for sale or rent. Address: J. Gallson, Mattawa, ON		
1931-Jun - Aug	John finds work on Hwy. 17 in Papineau Twp.		Gallsons move to shack on Gilligan's farm.
1931-Sep-14	Harvey Burrows interest is registered at Land Titles office		
1931-Nov-15			Jimmy born. Nov 18 newspaper announcement "Mr. and Mrs. Gallson are parents of a baby boy ..."

DATE	JOHN	FLORENCE	MARY
1932-July	Trout Mills property sells for \$500 to Helen Newby.	Flora is listed on the title, so her Public Trust official, Mr. Middleton, is listed in the title transfer. Assuming part of the money went to her care.	
1933-Feb	Mattawa Legion 254 created. John paid \$10 as a Charter Member		
1933-Aug-17	Advertises himself as a family man looking for a farm to run. Address: J. Gallson, Mattawa, ON		
1936-Jun-03	Barbara "Babbs" born		Barbara "Babbs" born.
1937-Sep-18	Hilda born		Hilda born
1939-May-19	Mae "Maisey" born		Mae "Maisey" born
1940-Aug-15	Papineau farm (parcel 2535) is transferred to John for \$300 (\$35 down payment) from Felix & Florence Bellaire.		As per Barbara: John took \$35 of Mary's money, went to Bellaire's store and bought property.
1942-Feb-12	Elizabeth "Betty" born		Elizabeth "Betty" born
1945-Nov-09		Flora transferred to St. Thomas Mental Asylum	
1946-Aug-02	first dated letter to Eduard in Estonia, refers to a previous letter containing information about John's "first wife" having a mental breakdown		
1947-Nov-30	John got up in the morning and disappeared.		
1947-Dec-13	Reported missing and OPP were searching for him. Article states "There is a possibility that he is an amnesia victim as he suffered shrapnel wounds in the head while serving in World War 1."		

DATE	JOHN	FLORENCE	MARY
1948-Nov-28	John writes to Joan from Goulois River, Algoma, that he does not want to be found.	Accidental Letter revealing Flora is alive in St. Thomas Mental Hospital around this time.	
1948-Dec-17	Second letter to Joan from Goulois River, Algoma		
1949-Mar	Phill returns from “a couple of months with Dad in the bush”		
1950-Jun-18			Donald Morrison dies in car accident
1960-Feb-09		Flora dies in St. Thomas Psychiatric Hospital after 31 years. Mary throws death notice in the fire according to Barbara	
1949 to 1977	John corresponds with brother Eduard, sister Aliise, brother August all in Estonia/Germany		
1965-Nov-03	John transfers sole ownership of farm to joint ownership with Mary		John transfers sole ownership of farm to joint ownership with Mary
Approx. 1975	John living in rooming house in Mattawa; taken home by Jean		John and Mary legally marry around this time
1979-Mar-24	John dies in North Bay		
1990-Jan-18			Dies, buried beside John.

Biographical Notes

Flora's Children



Jean



Joan



Phillip

As adults, The Three Musketeers were all church members and attended regularly, swearing was absolutely frowned upon in their presence, which is extraordinary considering that every second word from Grampa Gallson was “God-Damn!”. My mother taught all of her children the bedtime prayer which we said every night. *Now I lay me down to sleep...*

We attended Summer Church School when it was available in our rural community and had the minister over for dinner which was one of those times when the good china came out and the silverware with the extra fork and spoon. My mother's fear of God and belief in Jesus could have come from Mary. Mom belonged to the United Church when she was thirteen and took bible studies. When GG was institutionalized, she thought she was “damned”, a sign of a strong fear of God. Neither my grandfather nor Mary went to church. The belief in God and Jesus must have come from GG.

All of The Three Musketeers played bridge which is a complicated mathematical card game - “It's not for old people,” I recently told my daughter. “It's for smart people.”

Any worries that GG's mental illness was passed to her children was unfounded as none of the Musketeers displayed any signs other than the minor personality quirk of trying to be perfect in one way or another. They were all confident, high achieving, tenacious extroverts, highly social and excelled in whatever they set their minds to do. While I can't speak for what went on behind the closed doors of Uncle Phill's and Aunt Jean's homes, my mother occasionally spanked her children.

The examples that the three children carried with them into adulthood on how to be productive members of society, how to be a parent and how to love your children, came from only two sources: GG before 1930 and Mary afterwards. In my research on adults who experienced childhood trauma, there's always evidence and clues in the adult behaviour, but my mother, Aunt Jean and Uncle Phill have no such markers. Unless you heard their story, you would never know what they had been through. Was GG's influence so strong in the short time they were with her, that it outweighed anything that happened after 1929? Or was there more to Mary than what we were led to believe?

After reading my mother's diary, Carol and I wondered how could the Mary that Mom, Aunt Jean and Uncle Phill described as being cruel, mean and abusive, be the same woman my mother wrote about.

The Three Musketeers were victims of a type of parental abduction when the family disappeared into Papineau Township. Then, as adults, when the children found out the truth, rather than turn on their hero-father, they turned on Mary. And even though my mother outwardly turned with the others, I know she was conflicted.

Deep down Mom knew that Mary had been a mother to them, rightly or wrongly. Her diary is a testament to either her yearning for a mother-child relationship with the only mother she knew or she felt love and a bond with Mary. It's prudent to remember that Mom knew about Mary running away from home without her mother's knowledge and the Morrisons searched for Mary. So Mom and Mary had serious, personal conversations.

She enjoyed her relationship with Mary's sons, Jackie and Donny, and always looked forward to visits with all her half-siblings. Throughout her late teens and early twenties, she had an active, warm mother-daughter relationship with Mary.

Aunt Jean on the other hand, completely separated herself from Mary and all of Mary's children. She couldn't understand why my mother continued those positive relationships. My Mom was undeterred.

Jean

Aunt Jean was the first of three children born to Grampa and GG. She was born January 10, 1923 in Shawmont, Waterville, Maine. She was baptized on April 15 at the St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Waterville.

Aunt Jean worked from the moment she could walk out the door of the Mattawa childhood home, continuing to work throughout most of her life while raising four daughters. The story below is based on Mom's memories and the many conversations she had with Aunt Jean about her life.

Aunt Jean opted to leave home at the age of 14 to work as a live-in mother's helper for pregnant women during those postnatal months before moving on to the next woman. She met and married Carson before eventually moving to North Bay.

Aunt Jean got a job at Eaton's Department Store as a sales clerk where she continued to work even after it was bought by Walker's Department Stores.

She died in 2021 at the age of 98. She had four daughters, eight grandchildren, one predeceasing her, and many great-grandchildren.

Did Aunt Jean show any evidence of childhood trauma? I didn't know her home life very well. We visited a lot when I was young and everything seemed normal. But my version of "normal" was my mother's version of "normal". Spotless house, spotless children, amazing food.

I remember one time Aunt Jean came to visit my parents in Gravenhurst. Mom scrubbed and cleaned the house spotless in preparation. Mom found Aunt Jean in the kitchen scrubbing her sink. "Jean! I just cleaned that sink!" Aunt Jean stopped and laughed. "Joan, you know I can't help it." Then she went around the house with a little bowl of milk and a cottonball, and "washed" all the leaves of Mom's plants. I have to say, it did make the leaves shine.

Joan

Mom was born, Joan Vera Gallson, in Wauchula, Florida, January 4, 1925.

Her first memories are when she was about three or four years old and she fell down a flight of outside stairs. They were living in an upper apartment, maybe the one in Endicott, NY. She also remembered Christmas in the same building and there being a Christmas tree in the hall. She remembered her mother having nice things and in particular some beautiful napkin holders. She remembered falling out of the back of the truck when going to Trout Mills and Grampa stopping and picking her out of the ditch.

There's an interesting entry in my own journal from May 11, 1986 about how I was going to write a novel about GG. It says "... Mom remembers a nurse being there just before Gramma was taken away." Hmm.

Mary initially home-schooled the children and when Mom finally attended school, grade 5 or 6, she was so far ahead, she skipped a grade. She remembered doing well in history and geography, but not so well in arithmetic. Mom remembered being bullied and taunted with rhymes such as "Farmer John with her big boots on..."

Mom's teacher called social services to investigate the bruises that were found on Mom's shoulders. Through all this, Mom did so well in school that she was exempt from writing the entrance exam for high school.

Once in high school, Mom suffered even more abuse from her classmates as her clothes were shabby and ill-fitted.

Mom left home and worked as a live-in housekeeper at the tender age of 13. When her salary rose from \$5 to \$15 per month, Grampa instructed her to send \$5 per month home to Mary.

In September 1939, Canada joined WWII. Manufacturing businesses began recruiting females to work in their factories which had been converted to help in the war effort. In Toronto, Mom worked at the John Inglis factory as a Cutter Grinder at 37 Hanna Avenue until May 1943. Throughout that time, Mom boarded with a family at 28 Frankish Street, a 30-minute walk from the Inglis factory. Another 20-minute drive from work would have

taken Mom to the Lakeshore Mental Asylum where, unknown to her at the time, her mother was still alive.

My parents married in June 1943. She had four children, seven grandchildren, one predeceasing her and many great-grandchildren.

So did Mom show any signs of childhood trauma? Only in her perfectionism in everything she did, constantly trying to prove she had worth. But it was an unresolvable mission in her life because Mom never thought she was smart or exceptionally good at anything.

When Uncle Phill and his family would come to visit the farm, Mom would turn into a stressed cleaning machine. The precursor to those visits were anxiety ridden when Mom's "nervous colitis" kicked into high. But once the Gallsons got there, there was only joy. It was the same with picnics and family reunions, Bonfield Fairs, threshing gang events, Carol's wedding - total bedlam, then joy. Easy for me to say! Mom had medication for her nerves - needing to be perfect took its toll.

My mother kept a diary between 1941 and 1944 that reads like any typical teenager's life. Mary and Mom exchanged Christmas presents and birthday presents. "My ~~step~~ mother's birthday. I gave her \$1.00 for her birthday present," she wrote on September 6, 1941. The word "step" is solidly scratched over. It seemed that calling Mary a "step" mother was a bad thing in my mother's mind.

Throughout these years, Mom and Mary exchanged many letters, several per month, as well as Christmas and birthday gifts. Mom wrote about having a *swell* and *grand* time going **home** for Christmas and spending time with her family. She worried that Mary didn't like her boyfriend, Lloyd. She barely mentioned Grampa other than what she bought him for Christmas. She also worried that Lloyd didn't like her family, calling them "my people".

January 22, 1942, *"Here I am at home. Mom and Dad seemed so glad to see me. I'm so glad all over."*

January 23, *"Mom and Dad were so happy and so good to me."*

January 26, *"I'm afraid Mom doesn't think so much about Lloyd's and my engagement but I'm happy."*

Mom even wrote about visiting Mary's sister-in-law, Gladys, several times while she was living in Toronto.

April 29, 1943, *"I went to Aunt Glad's on Logan Ave. Met Mother's sister. She seemed very nice. They all seemed worried about Maw going to Neill's."*

September 6, 1943, *"She seemed very nice. She gave me a lot of stuff."*

February 29, 1943 *"Lloyd came down to Toronto this morning. Gee I [was] surprised and happy. We went to Mimico and seen (sic) Vera and Kay. Took pictures at Sunnyside. Had dinner in New Toronto..."*

The Lakeshore Mental Asylum was also referred to as the New Toronto Mental Asylum in Mimico. While Mom was at Sunnyside Park, her mother was a 12-minute drive away.

This three-year glimpse into my mother's life showed a woman who didn't allow her insecurities to stop her from doing anything she set her mind to do. Like GG, Mom walked towards challenges with determination. Is confidence a nature-or-nurture thing? While working at the Inglis Plant, she also secured a second job at the Harris Dairy as a bookkeeper (she always told me she was poor at math).

She passed away in October 2017 at the age of 92.

Phill



Grampa with Uncle Phill

Phillip John Gallson was born in Zolfo Springs, Florida on March 18, 1926.

Uncle Phill also related his memories of abuse which Sharlene put to paper. The following is an excerpt:

[When my Dad's father] went into the bush, food was rationed and the children were fed very little. Maw would even put marks on the food containers so she could tell if one of the children snuck something. If she

found food missing she would ask who took it and this child would receive a beating with a cat-of-nine-tails which was a leather strap with nine smaller strips attached. If no one would confess, they would all be beaten. My Dad and his sisters resorted to sneaking and eating raw eggs from the hen house or raw potatoes from the ground. They were clever enough to put the tops of the potatoes back in the ground so the area appeared undisturbed. Beatings were frequent for all sorts of reasons. To avoid such a beating, my Dad once stitched a small chick together after accidentally squashing it with a cellar door. Amazingly, the chick survived! Maw refused to call my Dad, Phillip, his given name, saying that he would never be "filled up".

This is likely the reason Uncle Phill was called "Bobby" as a child.

Both my mother and Uncle Phill were accelerated by a grade or two when they entered public school after being home schooled by Mary. That alone is cause for pause. Mom graduated from Mattawa Public School with honours. When Uncle Phill graduated from grade eight, called "Senior fourth grade" at that time, he was also exempt from writing the high school entrance exam because of his high marks, but like her, he never attended.

On March 18, 1944, on his 18th birthday, Uncle Phill registered for the United States Army, but continued to work in Toronto as a bell hop at the Royal York Hotel and was living at 14 Wright Avenue. Unbeknownst to him, he was a 22-minute drive away from the Lakeshore Mental Asylum.

Did Uncle Phill have any signs of childhood trauma? He, like my mother, suffered from the need to be perfect. He dressed impeccably at all times. Even in his pictures of horseback riding and tricks, he's in a suit jacket. Sharlene said his closet was filled with many suits, meticulously rotated according to use. His house was immaculate, a strong compulsion from him that thankfully equalled the desires of Aunt Marian. When he was in the hospital just before he died, the nurses commented on how handsome he was, and how soft and well manicured his hands were! Uncle Phill never had a hair out of place.

Thus, the reason the story of Mary sending him upstairs to put on a decent pair of pants when the minister came to visit, knowing he only had the ones he was wearing, was such a memorable event for him.

Uncle Phill was very secretive about certain aspects of his life, but he became known as the "story-teller". Like my mother, he had no issues with sharing his life with family, and was

very supportive in my quest of family history. However, he did pick and choose what stories he was willing to share and perhaps embellish.

Uncle Phill had three children, twelve grandchildren, one predeceasing him.



The Three Musketeers were all church members and attended regularly, swearing was absolutely frowned upon in their presence, which is extraordinary considering that every second word from Grampa Gallson was “God-Damn!”. My mother taught all of her children the bedtime prayer which we said every night, *Now I lay me down to sleep...*

Mary's Children

Mom's half siblings and Mary were always invited to our family weddings. Mom insisted they be invited to all of them and a few of the half-siblings always came bringing Mary. They even drove all the way from Mattawa to Timmins to attend my brother, Wayne's wedding.

In all the obituaries that I can find on Newspapers.com and clippings that Mom saved in her scrapbook, The Three Musketeers are always mentioned and acknowledged as siblings.

Donny

Donald was born in Oshawa on February 23, 1927. His father had some "connection with the boarding house" that Mary's mother ran.

On Sunday, June 18, 1950, at 5:30am, Donald, at the age of 23, was killed in a car accident. A newspaper clipping reports that his life-long friend, Rheame Doucette, was driving with Rheame's brother, Theodore and Donald as passengers. After the accident, a stranger put the injured Donald into his car to transport him to the hospital, but the car stalled. Donald was then put into a Colonial bus and in Mattawa was transferred again into a taxi. (I guess the hospital wasn't on the bus route!). He was pronounced dead upon arrival with a broken neck and broken back but reports say he likely died minutes after the accident. Rheame and Theodore were not seriously injured. Rheame received a \$25 fine and a 1-year suspended license. Both Rheame and Theodore were pall-bearers as well as my father.

Jackie

John, known as Jackie, was born within months of Mary moving in with the Gallsons, on August 8, 1930. The Gallson children all thought Jackie was their biological sibling and were all shocked when this proved to be untrue. Mom told me that the discovery had something to do with Jackie joining the army. More likely than not, it was around 1948 that the whole deception blew up.

Jackie married and had five children: three boys and two girls. Mark Gallson died in 1988 in a car accident in Alberta. David Gallson lost both of his legs in a separate automobile incident. Ironically, he went on to become the National Executive Director of Mood Disorders Society of Canada.

I will be forever grateful to Jackie for passing along all the letters written by Grampa's siblings in Estonia. They are a unique window into life in Estonia in the mid 1900s.

Jackie's life was truly a story of resilience and overcoming both childhood and adult trauma, and the fact he was able to maintain a kind and caring relationship with my mother into her widow-years attests to his character. Jackie died in November 2025.

Jimmy

Jimmy was the first child born to Mary and Grampa on November 15, 1931. He had a mental challenge that Mom said was caused by sun stroke after Mary left him out in the sun too long as a baby. Barbara verified this during a visit with her in August 2025.

Jimmy never married and lived at the Gallson house until his death on July 26, 1998.

My memories of Jimmy are of a sweet, childlike man who was always smiling and happy.

Babbs

Barbara, known in her childhood and early adulthood as "Babbs", was born in 1936. She married in 1953 and later divorced. She had one boy and five girls including Gail who interviewed her mom for this book.

In the fall of 2024, I began to communicate with Gail using Facebook messenger. She indicated that she had been close to Mary, her biological grandmother, but it wasn't until December of that year that it occurred to me to pursue information about Mary. I began to have a nagging feeling that the story I knew of Mary Morrison was deeper than what I had imagined.

That December, I posed quite a few questions to Gail, asking if her mother had ever talked about Mary's past. In early 2025, Gail messaged me, offering to interview her mother and began chronicling Mary's history.

Gail's words "*my dear Granny Gallson*" were a shock to read and I knew then there was truly another side of the story. The section on Mary Morrison contains the information from the interviews Gail had with her mother.

Barbara and her children lived on the Gallson property in a trailer for a period of time during which a reciprocal assistance developed into a genuine bond and closeness.

To the best of my knowledge, out of all of the ten children that grew up under Mary's care, Barbara is the only one with whom Mary maintained a positive lifelong and loving relationship.

A picture, taken at Barbara's wedding, shows my mother wearing a corsage, prompting me to discover that my mother was Barbara's maid-of-honour.

In the fall of 2025, Barbara was told by her doctor that she had terminal cancer. She died March 6, 2026.

Hilda

Hilda, born on September 18, 1937, was a beauty. She married a teacher, had three children, then divorced.

I met with Hilda at her home in Toronto in the 1990s perhaps. We talked about her life in Mattawa and her own negative feelings towards Mary. She said that she remembered realizing that Mom was not the biological daughter of her mother and how jealous she felt because she could never say "That's not my real mother!" Hilda shared information about how Grampa would hide for weeks at "Gilligan's Shack" near their property just to get away from Mary. And how Mary abused all the children, not just the Three Musketeers.

It's interesting to note that Hilda's second name, Alice, is the only child who carries a hint of being named possibly after Grampa's sister, Aliise. Not one of Grampa's children carry any names of his parents or his siblings, other than Hilda. In fact, even the name Hilda is Nordic.

I was lucky enough to have had the chance to visit with Hilda when she lived in Toronto. During that visit, she drew a map showing Gilligan's Shack where Grampa isolated himself, her recollection that when Grampa was missing for two years he was in Sault Ste. Marie, that Grampa visited GG possibly during those two years, that the OPP and the RCMP were involved in trying to find him and that she was 11-12 years old at the time (1948).

Hilda died in October 2018 at the age of 81.

Maisie

Mae, "Maisie", was born on May 19, 1940, married in 1961 and had three boys, including Daniel, and one daughter, Bonnie. Maisie worked at the mill in Mattawa before she had her children and continued her life as a mother and homemaker.

Pictured here is Maisie with Mary and Gail Turcotte.

Maisie's daughter, Bonnie, reached out to me a few years ago asking if I could tell her what Grampa was like! I was more than a little shocked that she thought I would have known him better than she did. How was that possible when he lived in the same area where she grew up? She said she'd only seen him a few times in her whole life.

Bonnie sent me a message via Ancestry.ca on May 16, 2021:

I was quite young when my mother used to bring me on visits to her mother's place. My father would never go as he had nothing good to say about (Mary who) did not attend their wedding or approve of their marriage - my mother said it had to do with religious differences. I know that there was a lot of favouritism in the family, from my mother's perspective. ... When her father [Grampa Gallson] died, something happened and we no longer visited with her mother. (My mother) did not attend (Granny Gallson's) funeral.

I understand (Mary) was not a nice woman to her step children. She wasn't a nice woman to my mother either.

My mother told me that her father used to spend all of his time outside with their animals or in the barn. She also mentioned that he was a very quiet man.

Other things I remember are the fact that she either called her mother "the old lady" or spoke of her as Granny Gallson. I can vaguely remember visiting with her when I was quite young. The house was so very small!!! I was put to work rolling cigarettes while they visited! I think I was about 5-6 years old at the time. This would have been the house in Papineau Township. I did meet my Granny Gallson again when she was in the Algonquin Nursing Home in Mattawa [where] she was admitted ...with dementia, but at this point my mother and (Granny Gallson) did not talk or have any relationship.

In a subsequent email...

I don't recall my mother ever mentioning her step sisters/brother to me. And when I was a teenager I can remember there being some announcement that grandpa Gallson had a whole other family. Maybe my mother simply didn't tell us kids.

Maisie's son, Daniel believed that Mary was the Gallson's nanny and when Flora "died", Grampa and Mary entered into a relationship. A beautiful anecdote that I wish were true. I therefore reached out to Daniel to get more of his memories and to let him know what truly happened.

Wendy, my mother was very fond of your mother and would always refer to her as Aunt Joanie denoting her appreciation and affection.

We did have close relationships with Aunt Barbara [Turcotte] and her children and as well with Aunt Betty and Uncle Robert [Chenier] (who was a distant cousin to my father) and their kids when they visited Mattawa from Sudbury. I was lucky enough to have a very good relationship with my Uncle Robert Howard as he was a teacher (and Vice Principal) in my Catholic grade school.

My mother once told me how Granny Gallson was not approving of my father. From my observations as a child, Granny Gallson continued her condescending attitude towards my father generally as long as I could remember. I do remember my father [was] quite disappointed with my mother when one of us [recalled] that Granny Gallson punished [me] or one of my brothers with a long wooden spatula/stirring implement. That situation put a virtual end to my father visiting the "Farm". When we were there [my brother and I] would try to be out in the barn with Grandpa because that was more fun. I still remember being scared and then laughing when Grandpa Gallson chopped the heads off a few chickens. The fear was watching [the] strike not knowing what would come next, the laughter happened when Grandpa joked about running around literally with a head chopped off.

My father and Grandpa Gallson, from my perception, were quite close. Grandpa Gallson would occasionally work with my father [when] I saw his handyman skills. My father shared how Grandpa Gallson liked to get away from the farm and do other stuff which were not home chores. My memories of Grandpa Gallson were all good. I do remember my father teaching us gun safety and proper shooting when I was about 12 perhaps. Grandpa Gallson was a good shot when we did targetting and he also taught us how to snare rabbits when I was younger about this same point in time. He was also a good gardener and my mother seemed to inherit those skills from her parents and passed down biophilia and connection to nature to me.

Maisie died in 2022 in Mattawa at the age of 82.

Betty

Elizabeth was born in 1942. She was the youngest and became a teacher. In fact, she was the principal at my primary school in Rutherglen for one year. She married around 1962 and had two children.

Mom either made or altered Betty's wedding dress and made flower girl dresses. Maisie's daughter Bonnie had a memory of Betty wearing her mother's wedding dress. I remember Aunt Betty coming to our house in Rutherglen for fittings. I begged her to let me be a flower girl too and, to my surprise, she consented. Dad and Robert knew each other as they'd been in some Nipissing District plowing matches together. I was absolutely thrilled to be Aunt Betty's flower girl with my cousin Cathy, Hilda's daughter.

Aunt Betty died in February 2026 after a long battle with dementia. It took months for news of her death to reach the family.

Acknowledgements

Linda Hillman, my friend, for her patience, encouragement and for always finding my stories interesting. Foremost, for listening to me for many years talk about my Grandmother Gallson.

Jackie Gallson, for all the letters my grandfather received from Estonia.

Sharlene Buszka, my friend and cousin, for her advice, keeping it professional, and calling me out when I got too personal. Also, for chronicling her father's life and allowing me to include those memories in this book.

Ellen Irs, Estonian Heritage volunteer, for translating all the Estonian letters to English, and my English letters to Estonian, for nothing more than a bouquet of flowers. RIP

Carol Sullivan, my friend and sister, for being as curious for the truth as I am and always being thoughtful and open to all my theories and hypotheses and always willing to come with me on my adventures.

Gail Turcotte, my friend and cousin, for her bravery and her own curiosity in chronicling her mother, Barbara's memories and the life of her "dear Granny Gallson", then sharing those stories with me and allowing me to include those memories in this book. Invaluable.

Barb Turcotte, my Aunt Babbs, for agreeing to share her memories and her photo albums with me.

Source Reading

The Great Depression

<https://www.canada.ca/en/correctional-service/corporate/history-csc/timeline/1920-1939.html>

Empire Settlement Act (1922)

<https://pier21.ca/>

Ocean Weather 1920 Weather Highlights of the ‘Roaring Twenties’

<http://thestarryeye.typepad.com>

Overseas Settlement Committee

The Women’s Leader

<https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk> March 19, 1920, pp 154-155

Syphilis Treatments Pre-1943

<https://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/history-syphilis-part-two-treatments-cures-and-legislation>

Stuart Auto Camp & Seminole’s Auto Camps along Dixie Hwy, Florida

<https://archive.tcpalm.com/yournews/martin-county/historical-vignettes-tin-can-camps--tourism-exciting-fun-ep-380986748-342703862.html>

Biographical information about Phillip John Gallson

Biography of Phillip J. Gallson, by Sharlene Buszka

Stockholm Syndrome and Abusive Parent Trauma

<https://themighty.com/topic/trauma/stockholm-syndrome-abusive-parent-trauma/>

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/stockholm-syndrome.html>

St. Thomas Mental Hospital history

<https://freaktography.com/urban-exploring-the-abandoned-st-thomas-psychiatric-hospital/>

<https://www.talkingwallphoto.com/abandoned-ontario-asylums/abandoned-st-thomas-ontario-psychiatric-hospital/>

Untold by Dieter Buse (\$13 on Kindle)

Stories of WWI soldiers including submissions specifically on John Gaalson and further research by Mr. Buse.

<https://www.amazon.ca/Untold-Northeastern-Ontarios-Military-Peacekeeping/dp/1988989167>

Endicott-Johnson Tannery and Shoe Factory

Fabulous website on this company with a great “flip-book” about all the benefits of working there.

<https://peterserko.com/endicott-johnson-shoe-company/>

Tonsil Cancer, Symptoms and Causes, Website: MayoClinic.org,

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/tonsil-cancer/symptoms-causes/syc-20367939>



Sharlene, granddaughter, and her husband John, walking in support of mental health care.
Spring 2026. Buffalo, NY

Author's Note

Almost everything in this book is grounded in documented research, my mother's memories, and interviews with people who knew I was writing this book. Where dialogue appears, it is based on documented accounts, letters, or reasonable inference from known facts. However, there are many logical, speculative, conclusions that are drawn from incomplete evidence.

This is the sixth revision as I repeatedly lost, then regained, the courage to include certain inexplicable events that presented themselves over the past 40 years. What I call *pokes* and *nudges*, these adrenaline rush feelings sounded too ethereal - *other worldly* - that led me to a personal belief that coincidences are extremely rare if they exist at all.

These experiences feel like someone trying to get my attention. Something happens and my grandmother is pushed to the forefront of my mind—there's something unsolved, needing closure. Sometimes it's subtle. Sometimes not so much. In the fall of 2024, I got another unexpected hard *nudge*.

My cable and internet router were giving me trouble, yet again. Off and on, plug and unplug, wait. Instead of staring at the LEDs, I grabbed page 13 from the 1931 Toronto census I printed a few days before where I discovered GG's name listed among the patients at the Lakeshore Mental Asylum. A week prior, I took a Toronto streetcar east on Lake Shore Blvd. to the grounds of the asylum which is now the Humber College Lakeshore Campus. I walked around the outside of the buildings and inside of two of the cottages, hoping to get a vibe, feeling or nudge from GG. I got nothing and knew her spirit wasn't there.

As I sat staring at the census, I hadn't realized that the television had kicked back into broadcasting but it was just background noise to me.

As I reread line 48 of page 13 of the census, the question in my ear was "What I don't understand is why she would have been committed to the Lakeshore Asylum so far from her home?" Unexpectedly, a voice, loud and clear, replied, "There's only two ways someone was committed: by getting the signatures of two doctors or by a court order if the person was deemed to be a danger to themselves or others."

I quickly pushed pause on the remote and stared at the screen. The voices were coming from the television. It was a CBC program called *The Knowing* about the search for an Indigenous woman, Annie Gauthier, who had been committed to the asylum and died there around 1934.

“Are you kidding me?” I said out loud, feeling the *rush* and the goosebumps.

I ran my finger down the census page reading the names. Lillian Ruth Brown, age 25, Irish; Albert Forsythe, age 65, English; Ida Jean Johnson, age 17, Irish; Annie Gauthier, age 65, Indian. Wow.

I pushed PLAY on the remote and finished watching the program. Annie died three years after the 1931 census, one of the causes being stomach gangrene according to the program. Damn! She was buried in an unmarked grave in the asylum’s cemetery in Toronto.

My most recent experience started in December 2025, when I decided to donate my research and this book to the Ontario Genealogical Society and just be done with it all. A promotion on their website caught my eye. A call for entries to a writing contest. I quickly created an abridged version, clicked submit and forgot about it.

In the months that followed, I decided that removing any mention of pokes and nudges would eliminate the chance that readers would see me as a believer in psychicism or spiritualism, or, as some people might say, “flakey”.

This fifth revision received an adamant “thumbs-down” review from Linda, my loyal friend and first-reader. At lunch in April 2026, she said, “Put them back!”

I was still debating the issue in my mind when later I sat down to check emails on my computer.

“Congratulations,” an email from the Ontario Genealogy Society started. My abridged version won third prize.

I texted Linda and she replied quickly: *You just got another poke!*

So, I threw apprehension to the wind and put all the pokes and nudges back and began working on this revision.

The abridged version of this book, then titled STIGMA, was featured in the August 2026 and September 2026 *Families* magazines published and distributed by OGS.

There are three movies that I watched that gave me goosebumps and I swear were *pushes*.

Archie, the true story of Cary Grant. I really had no interest in the life of this movie star, but for some unknown reason I watched it, maybe because my mother was a Cary Grant fan. When I pushed PLAY, I had no idea that Grant's real name was Archie and that his mother was put into a mental asylum by his father when he was a child and that he was told that she was dead. He found out as a successful actor-adult that his mother was indeed alive in an English asylum. His story has a happier ending, saying that only by comparison, that GG's.

Maudie, the true story of the famous Nova Scotia folk artist Maud Lewis. Everett Lewis needed a house keeper so he put up an advertisement at the corner store. Maud, eager to get away from her family's emotional abuse, bargained with Everett for room and board but there was only one bedroom and one bed. Maud had no choice but to either sleep with Everett or sleep on the floor.

A Woman Under The Influence, starring Peter Falk, about a woman whose erratic behaviour and mental instability lead her husband to have her institutionalized.

And then there's the book, published posthumously, by Karen Hill, the sister of the famous singer-songwriter Dan Hill and the author Lawrence Hill, titled ***Café Babanussa***. Most interesting is the autobiographical section at the end of the book titled ***On Being Crazy***. Karen inherited the bipolar gene from her mother who was institutionalized *and released many times*. She ended her life at the age of 90, choosing MAID in Switzerland. There is a beautiful article in MacLeans magazine (macleans.ca) titled ***As She Lay Dying: A Memoir*** by Dan.

*All knowledge is worth seeking,
but not all is worth keeping.*

Old memories are like old corpses. They never quite seem the same when you dig them up.

- Hester Frump, “Wednesday” 2022, S2 E4, Netflix

