A Short Biography featuring Gertrude Mary Youngs Vail

Celebrating Gert's 75th birthday, January 15, 2000.

In her lifetime Gert has been:

A caring daughter,

A devoted wife,

A loving mother,

A patient sister,

An attentive grandmother,

A thoughtful aunt,

A reliable cousin,

A faithful employee, and

A lifetime friend.

This version of Gert's life has been gathered from remembered stories, first hand observations, facts, anecdotes and family history, recorded here by Edie Rhodes, Gert's younger (and adorable) sister.

THUMBNAIL SKETCH

Born on January 15, 1925, in Jersey City, NJ, Gertrude was the first child of Geraldine McFalls Youngs and Harold Youngs, known here as Mom and Pop. Gert was named after her two grandmothers. She lived the first few years of her life in Bayonne and Jersey City, where Pops' trucking and auto laundry businesses were located. Most of her childhood was spent, however, in Elizabeth, NJ, until high school, when the family moved to Roselle Park, NJ. The rest of her story, marriage, children and retirement will be unfolded as you read along.

STORIES ABOUT MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS: George McFalls and Gertrude Wadsworth McFalls (Ma)

Family roots:
We were told they were of Scottish ancestry. The supposition is that the families came from originally from Scotland and settled in Nova Scotia. Next, they must have moved to Gouverneur in upper New York State, near the St. Lawrence River. Mom recalled hearing that her relatives had come from this town. At some point in the late 1800's the McFalls family moved to Brooklyn, NY. George McFalls, Gert's grandfather, had an insurance business with his brother David, in downtown New York. This business was still in the family in the 1950's. (I worked in the area and looked up my Uncle Dave, my grandfathers' brothers son.) It still could be around.

STORIES ABOUT MOM GROWING UP:

Mom often talked about growing up in Flatbush, a section of Brooklyn, NY. She proud of the fact that the house they lived in was the first on the block to have electricity. On Monday's, someone came to do laundry in tubs. On Tuesday, someone did the ironing and so on. Truck farmers came by on a regular schedule to sell fresh foods. Bread and ice were delivered. Mom thought that this was more convenient then having to drive to super markets and carry the produce home. She would really approve of the way my daughter Jean in Boston food shops. They order all their food from lists on the computer and it is delivered to their door the next day. If you spend over $60.00 there is no delivery charge. Either that, or send your husband out with a list, a convenient method I often used.

One time Mom's father built a doghouse too big to get out of the cellar. Never heard exactly what happened to it.

They lived right across from her elementary school, which has since become a Jewish Yeshiva. On a trip to see her old neighborhood, Mom's house was gone, but the school was there with the old name imbedded in cement over the front door.
One of our family treasures is Mom's piano chair, which was pulled into the living room for the piano teacher to sit upon while Mom had lessons. Nancy has this sweet hall chair and, until recently, it was used as a 'time out chair' when one of her boys or husband, needed quieting down.
Mom also told of family vacations in Chappaqua, NY and sitting on a rock on the center of town. It had to be very rural at that time. She remembered riding her bike over the neck of a chicken. She said she could never ride on that path again. One time she went back to Chappaqua to visit a girlfriend she had made in her childhood. Both the friend and the rock were still there.

McFalls Family Tragedy:

When Mom was 12 years old, on a family vacation at Oyster Bay, Long Island, her father George and her sister Marion, aged 8, were drowned in a boating accident. It seems the boat tipped over and he jumped in to try to save his daughter. This event greatly changed her life. Ma sold their home and, after that, they lived only in apartments. Geraldine went to Eramus Hall High School and Brown's Secretarial School. Ma, born in about 1870, died from in 1937 from a stroke.

ABOUT MOM'S SISTER ALICE

Aunt Alice and Mom were the only of the five children in the McFalls family to survive to adulthood. (When I named a son Curtis, Mom did mention she had had a brother, Curtis Lamar, named after a family friend, who died at 18 months). Aunt Alice, who eventually moved to Nyack, married David Gibbons and had a son Craig Gibbons (1939). Word has it that her first marriage, to a Clark Gable look alike, ended in a "quickie Mexican divorce". Ma thought this was a terrible disgrace. Alice died when she was about 60, from withdrawal and depression. She was attractive and artistic. Although her son spent some summers with us, being about the same age as Gert's younger brother Harold, after Craig left for the Navy, we lost track of him.

STORIES ABOUT PATERNAL GRAND PARENTS , JAMES YOUNGS, 1870-(?)Mary Frances Nicholls Youngs,1870-?

Pop was one of five children, living in Bayonne, NJ. His father James was a carpenter and we still have some pieces of the furniture he made. Gert's son Craig Vail, has his grandfathers tool chest. Pop told us that his father had worked as a carpenter on an outreach church from his Presbyterian Church in Bayonne, a Chinese-Presbyterian Church in downtown New York, when the Chinese were first arriving in this country. Bayonne is just across the Hudson River from what is now Chinatown.

Pop's brother, Robert M.Youngs, took his granddaughter Mary into this church on Broadway near Varrick Street in New York City because he wanted her to see the pew with the Youngs name on it. Although it could not be found, it did confirm that Pop's father had been very active in the formation of this church.

I found one interesting letter in their family Bible. It asks for help for Mary Youngs, having recently become a widow with five young children. This must refer to Pops grandmother, Mary.
Mom always said that her Mother in law, Mary Frances Nicholls Youngs, was a very strong-minded person. Jim Rhodes has a sword engraved with the name Robert Nicholls, brother of Mary. The story Pop once told about his Mother was the fact that she had diabetes and when he was in school, he would come home and give her insulin shots in her leg. She must have been one of the first people to get these shots. Later I heard that she became blind. Pop and Uncle Rob both had grandchildren who developed diabetes early in life.
Both sisters died from influenza. One sister, Agnes, never married. The other, Mabel, married Ted Dahl and they lived near Ridgewood, NJ. She died when Evelyn was about three and her brother Ted Jr. was about six. Ted Jr. died about five years ago from hepatitis. Evelyn is still hale and hearty, recently moving to Florida and marrying cousin Ginny's husband, after Ginny died from a stroke. The second brother, James, worked for years at Otis Elevator, in Cleveland, Ohio. His son, James, is living in California and we are still in touch with him. He serve in World War 2 and married Wanda and they had four children. (see chart) The third brother was Uncle Rob.
Attached is the Youngs family genealogical chart, a record since 1776. I think Gert is fifth generation New Jerseyian, but I doubt if anyone has ever bothered to point this out, until now.

STORY ABOUT MOM AND POP MEETING AND GETTING MARRIED.

As I heard it, Harry Youngs and Geraldine McFalls met through his sister. Agnes and Mom worked downtown NewYork in Uncle Dave's insurance company and Mom visited at Agnes' home in Bayonne, New Jersey, on weekends. Soon Mom noticed her brother Harry or maybe it was the other way around. They were married in 1920, after he got out of the Navy. He served in WW1 on a U-Boat chaser off the coast of New York and New Jersey.

Next, Pop and a friend bought one rack truck and started Youngs & Taylor Trucking Company. Soon, Pop bought out his partner and ran this business until 1945, when, due to the war and severe arthritis, he sold it. It was till in operation in the seventies. He shipped silicate of soda in tank trucks for Colgate, Palmolive-Peat and others. Mom used to help him type the bill each month, which I remember was a tense time because there were no computers or calculators, only carbon paper, typewriters and a huge adding machine.

Pop also ran an auto laundry, to utilize his garage space during the depression when the trucks were not moving. The men who worked for him were very loyal and where ever he opened a car wash, they would always come and work for him.

During the depression, his bank closed and he lost his savings. The bank vaults were later used as storage vaults for a dry cleaning business and everyone said he had been taken to the cleaners.(1934)

As a Republican, Pop hated FDR and the New Deal. He did not like income taxes, social security and especially, as a truck owner, the ICC, the Interstate Commerce Commission. One time he had me, I must have been five of six, tell a joke to his friends about some men bragging about strong men in their country. One told about a great swimmer in France, another a marathon runner in Germany and the best was about an invalid in the U.S. who could swing a bull by the tail across the entire country. (Oh, the things you remember.)

STORIES ABOUT LIVING IN JERSEY CITY:

At first, Mom and Pop lived in Bayonne with Pop's family. Next they rented an apartment in Jersey City, near where Pop had his business. It was while living there that Gert had her tonsils out, lying on the kitchen table. It had to be about 1928, and I guess it was just a routine thing. Years later it does seem almost unbelievable. I clearly

remember a mechanical merry-go-round on a truck down the street, which Gert got to ride and I did not. Hm.
Mom's mother, always known as Ma, would often visit us since it was easy for her to get to Jersey City from Brooklyn Heights. She just had to take a subway to Fulton Street and then a ferry to NJ where someone would meet her at Journal Square. Sometimes she had to ride in the cab of a truck. As I remember her, she was rather tall and slender and had purple veins on the back of her hands.

STORIES ABOUT the GROWING FAMILY:
In 1929, two months after the Stock Market crash, Gert finally had a sister. I was named Edith Geraldine. Gert's favorite toy was a stuffed animal called Carrot. Maybe I was next best. Or was it Blackie, a short hair terrier who would let you cover him with towels after we had given him a bath?
In 1932, the family moved to Elizabeth, NJ. They lived at 839 McGee Ave., and the comfortable brick house is still standing, the neighborhood looks unchanged even today.
They joined the Second Presbyterian Church in downtown Elizabeth. They choose that church because they happen to visit it on Children's day and it looked so warm and friendly. Later, both Gert and I were part of those Children's Day pageants. (You can read about them on the enclosed programs.)
Before each class went off to its own area, the Sunday school assembled in a great room with high a ceiling and balconies with an orchestra to supply the music. Gert's kindergarten teacher was named Mrs. Seaton. The mothers sat around the edge of the room and someone decided to get those Moms into their own class. Hence, the Fideles were founded. Mother was a staunch member of the Fideles Women Bible Class, where they ran many rummage sales and luncheons to raise money for foreign missionaries. In the back of the church is an old Indian burial ground.

STORIES OF GERT GROWING UP IN ELIZABETH:

Gert walked to Elmora School 12, on Magee Avenue. She still remembers her teachers, especially Mrs. McBride. Next, she went to Alexander Hamilton Junior High School. The principal lived in our neighborhood and we knew his children. Gert also played with Gwennie Davis, whose father owned Davis Drug Store. Gert still keeps in touch with her, even though she has moved to California. Pop would take us for a drive on hot summer nights and we would end up at Davis Drug Store for Bryers ice-cream cones. If we were really lucky, we would get a double dipped cone for 10 cents.

A WORD ABOUT HAROLD YOUNGS, JR.

On Columbus Day, Oct. 12, 1937, Harold Jr. was born at Miss Quinns, a nursing home in the neighborhood. Imagine, a bouncing boy after two girls, now ages 7 and 12. Mother had her own car and, when she was expecting the baby, she was able to go out the back door and get into her car so, according to her, none of the neighbors even knew she was in that condition.

Harold was a nice addition to this family. He never was too much work for Mom, who was forty when he was born, (easy for me to say). One time he climbed into her old Hupmobile and released the break. The car rolled into the street, but no traffic was coming. Although Harold was 12 years younger than Gert, we was a lively force at home, staying around while he was still in College. He was very easy going and had a great sense of humor. He did not argue with Pop during the McCarthy hearings, as I might have. One incident I remember was that he was in a car with one girl, listening to request songs coming over the radio. The next song was dedicated to Harry Youngs, called “Chains of Love” requested from some other girl. I wonder how that night ended.

Harold graduated from Rutgers U. and served in the Naval Reserve, where he met Kathy Kronquist in Providence, RI. They married and had two children. (Another family chart). Sometimes they rented a house on LBI, while we were all vacationing down there. One time Craig, Gerts son, who was about 30, filled a paper pie plate with whipped cream and actually plastered Harry’s face with it. It was very funny. It wasn’t my face.

His untimely death, at 56, left us all saddened. Please read the

eulogy Gert and I wrote and delivered at his funeral.

FAMILY OUTINGS:

While Gert was growing up, we often went to a small old- fashioned farmhouse in Oldwick, near Whitehouse, NJ. My Uncle Rob owned the property and he gave the house to us. Gert and I would swim in a nearby stream. There were cows all around in the fields. Once they got into our yard when there was no one there and I remember how upset Mom was over the awful mess. At home, in the summertime, we would play hide and seek with all the kids in the neighborhood, while it was still light. Gert would ride her bike over to Kane's farm. This property is now the site of Kane College, a legacy from Senator Kane of Citizen Kane fame.

Sometimes we would drive down to Brown's bakery and even stop at Schultz's Ice-cream shop, next door. I can still remember the wonderful aroma from that place. Our dentist, Dr. Radcliff, was just up-stares in this building. Good location you might say.
Gert always had lots of girl friends and they would form clubs. I was always in the way, that bratty little sister. Gert and her friends would take a bus into Elizabeth to go shopping, either the #24 or the #40, since they both passed our house. Sometimes they rode the bus to the Twin Cities roller skating rink. Actually, one of her friends married the son of the owner of the skating rink, Gwenny married the bus driver who often took the girls there.

As I recall, Gert was good in school but really hated spelling tests. Once, after being on a boardwalk in Manasquan, NJ, she get a bad splinter in her foot and had to go to the hospital to get it out. (Where was that kitchen table now?)

Gert was a Girl Scout, her leader was Mrs. Carnickie . Once Gert even went off to Girl Scout camp and learned how to make Angles on Horseback. I think they were toasted cheese with bacon on rolls, I was very impressed.

OTHER FAMILY OUTINGS

We often went into Jersey City to visit friends in Bayonne. The Sweeneys lived in a huge brownstone next to the railroad tracks. We loved to go through that house, all the floors and so many rooms. We also visited the Gardners, who lived on West 45th Street, the block Pop grew up on. Sometimes we went into Brooklyn to visit Ma, or the Queens to see Aunt Thelma. Mom often took us into Radio City or to see the shows at the Roxy Theater in New York City. Sometimes we would go to the aquarium in the Battery in New York, taking the Jersey Central Rail Road and the ferry and then take a double-decker bus up 5th Ave., to the Cloisters. Once we went to Washington, D.C. Ma went with us.
Pop would take us to Warenaco Park for ice-skating, to Galloping Hill Golf course for tobogganing and Wyoming Avenue for sledding. Winters were colder then?

I remember Gert listening to the radio when I wanted to play school with her. Pop would bring home the Jersey Journal and Gert always wanted to read the funnies. And we both played with baby Harold, I remember rocking him to sleep in a cradle which has been used by all of us, our children and even our grandchildren. (In between babies, we used it to store LP records.) No wonder it is very decrepit at this point.

Mom enrolled Gert in Miss Hilicks ballroom dancing class and it was there that she met Bob Vail, a nice boy from Roselle Park. Many of her friends went to this dancing school, both the boys and the girls had to wear white gloves. Bob visited Gert in Elizabeth and when we moved to his hometown, Roselle Park, she saw even more of him.

More stories about relatives:

Our nearest relatives were Aunt Bea and Uncle Rob Youngs, Pop's brother, in Bernardsville, NJ. They lived on an estate, with an orchard, a pond and hunting dogs. Their two girls, Ginny and Jane, were a little older than Gert, nice to Gert and never noticed me. Sometimes we went horse -back riding with them in Kenilworth, not far from where Gert later moved. One Christmas they gave us both

dolls with lots of hand made clothing, a small cedar chest and a tall wardrobe. This all might have happened over several years.
Their son, Bob Jr., went to Yale, the girls to Georgean Court, outside of Lakewood. Our visits to Bernardsville were always like parties. Aunt Bea was able to press a buzzer with her foot to signal her maid when she needed her to come out from the kitchen. I was very impressed. I have always wanted such a buzzer, but when I would search around on the floor for one, it was just not there.
During the war, Ginny worked in Newark and would come to our home and stay over night. I loved hearing about her boy friends.

STORIES ABOUT ROSELLE PARK:
Here is a small town, very different from living in the city of Elizabeth. We moved because, due to the great depression, the mortgage on the house in 1940 was greater than the market value. Ma had died and left Mom enough money to buy a house "free and clear". I think the Magee Ave. house was bought for $12,000 in 1933 and had a mortgage of $6,000. I know we bought the Roselle Park house for $5,000. We lived on a very busy corner, Walnut Street and Grant Avenue. Before long we seemed to know everyone. Then Pop opened the Minute-Man Auto Laundry in town, the first automatic car wash east of the Mississippi or so the ad read.

Gert made many new friends, including some of Bob's boyhood buddies, like Charlie Johnson, whom they still see to this day. On special occasions, Gert and Bob and friends, would go to the Flagship Restaurant and hear Spike Jones and his City Slickers.

During World War II, we were having air raid practices, blackouts and food and gasoline rationing. Once Pop siphoned gas into Mom's car. Gert helped collect old metal things for a scrap iron pile. Her first records, which she played incessantly, were "The Little Red Fox" and "Deep Purple". She and her friends would go down into the basement and play Ping-Pong and who knows what else. I always tried to check up on her and sometimes got caught. I remember lying on my stomach with my head peeping through the cellar stairs. And who remembers that Pop once fixed the back door bell and after that it only rang in the basement? And that I was in college before they get a refrigerator to replace their old General Electric, that had a huge fan on the top of it

and no light inside.

BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL, GERT'S ENGAGMENT AND MARRIAGE

It wasn't long before Gert had graduated from high school, class of 1942, went to Moon Secretarial School and became engaged to marry Bob. This was wartime, 1942, and Bob, although he tried to enlist, was not able to serve due to a badly broken elbow that never did heal correctly. Like every young man at that time, Bob felt terrible that he could not defend his country. Those boys who served were very brave and courageous and, because of them, we live in a country where individual freedom and human rights have been dearly won. The USA is still fighting to establish these principles throughout the world.

In 1943, at the tender age of 18, Gert and Bob became engaged to be married. We had their engagement at our house on a Sunday afternoon. They were married June 23, 1943 at our Second Presbyterian Church, in Elizabeth, NJ. I was the maid of honor, with Bob's sister Violet and others as bride maids. Their reception was at our house. Bob was so nervous that when he was repeating the vows in the Church, he said "I Gertrude, take thee Robert". (I know because I was standing right there.) Due to wartime restricted traveling, they went to Atlantic City for their honeymoon. Gert had a different dress for each day. They went to the Senator Hotel.

At first Bob worked with his dad in the milk delivery business. For most of his working years, he worked in the furniture department at Macy's. As I remember him, Bob would have made a perfect salesman, he was soft spoken, easy going and very good looking. For several years they rented an apartment in Roselle, on Walnut Street. Janet Elaine Vail was born there and so was Craig Kendall Vail.

Gert stopped working as a teller at the Roselle Park Savings and Loan, never to return to work until Janet and Craig were in high school. Before too long, they bought a house in Islin, NJ. After living there about 10 years they returned to Roselle Park and bought another house. This was especially nice since Mom and Pop were still living in the old homestead in RP and they were able to visit each other. Janet and Craig would stop in to see Pop on their way home from high school.

By this time, Bob's mother had died and his father was back living in Pleasantville, Pa.

GERT, BOB AND MOM IN KENILWORTH

When Gert went back to work, it was never to enhance her self but just to make the family living a little easier. She worked for many years at the Yellow Pages and when she retired, she had accumulated a nice profit sharing. In 1974, after Pop died from complications due to arthritis, Gert, Bob and Mom bought a home in Kenilworth. (Harry Jr., would say "What is this kennel worth?"). It was here that you appreciated what a good, peaceful person Gert was, keeping both Mom and Bob happy together. I remember how every Saturday morning she and Mom would go shopping, checking out garage sales on their way. Mom was lucky to have Gert around (and not have to live with my four teenagers). Mom, like her mother Ma, died from a stroke in 1984.

Stories about Retirement of Gert and Bob.

At first, Gert and Bob retired and lived on Long Beach Island, NJ., (where I still live). But finally they found a condo in St. Petersburg, Florida, where they have settled in. So many graduates from Roselle Park have moved to Florida, that they have an annual reunion for all the classes. Sometimes over 300 friends attend.
Gert and Bob have become very active in a 2,000 member Methodist church. They really enjoy the music programs, potluck meals and often, a Sunday night service on the beach. The best part of all is that recently Gert's daughter Janet has moved to St. Petersburg also. Now Gert has someone to go with to craft shows and see current movies, while Bob usually stays at home and checks with his friends on the computer. Janet has a nice apartment nearby and works as a private pediatric nurse. Just recently, Craig's daughter Heather graduated from the University of North Carolina and became engaged.

Still married, after 56 years, Gert and Bob must be doing something right. They have traveled a great deal and are still on the go. Name a place, Gert has probably been there. Gert, always spry and active, was slowed down by polymelgra rhumatitus. Today, Gert swims and walks regularly and is generally feeling better than she has for several years.

SUMMARY

I have tried to select experiences that affected Gerts personality and values. She had a comfortable childhood, was well cared for by responsible parents. You know Pop was always very honest in his businesses, not giving bribes to the notorious Mayor Hague in Jersey City and his cronies. He did have to "tip the cops" for staying around his garage on Saturday nights when he paid his crew. Pop was a member of the Masons, a fraternal organization. They had a Mason's service at Pops' funeral which Gert and I refuse to discuss, except in private. (Was it the spears or the aprons?) Mom was a member of the Eastern Star, which was affiliated with the Masons. When we were very young, she would go to their meetings in Bayonne, wearing a long white gown and kidskin gloves that reached her elbows. Really surprised is the only way I can recall feeling as we saw her ready to go out the door, so dressed up. Gert joined the Rainbow girls and the Eastern Star for a while.

Gert was well liked by her girlfriends and she always had Bob Vail following her around. I doubt she ever pictured herself as being a class leader. Rather, she saw herself as just another girl trying to get along, which she did very well.
Years later I met someone who remembered Gert from both Elizabeth and Roselle Park. She said how much she had always enjoyed Gert, she was always so nice and friendly.

Gert believed in strong family ties. We lived near enough to be able to celebrate many Thanksgivings and Christmases, with Mom and Pop, Gert and Bob and their two children and my gang and sometimes Harold Jr. and his family. One year my son Jim was playing football in High School on Thanksgiving morning and I still wonder why I let him taste (I mean eat) the pecan pie I had made before we got to Gerts' and Grandmas' house for the big turkey dinner.
I guess we survived the pie attack.

What a nice sister I have, we all love you.