

Thin Hardcover Artbook

What Peg knew was a lot



David Estes

for Kate

Remember how you hesitated before asking a parent about a subject you wanted to learn even more about; that was never the case when I asked Peggy to share what she knew about a photo from our family albums.

She was a remarkable person (and my mother-in-law).

cover: Peggy alongside the Charles River. Cambridge MA. 1953.

We are on a shingle beach along the Clarion River. I think we made the raft out of logs and a door we had found along the river. The river was so shallow and so full of rocks that the raft was not in danger of going very far.

Sue and I went to public school in Cleveland Heights. Fleur was a school friend of Virginia. They both went to one of the two private girls' schools in our area. We knew Virginia through her mother Florence Gray, widow of a horticulturalist who had written a garden column for one of the Cleveland papers.

We had met when our family went to Clear Creek State Park in PA every August for the month—2nd grade up to our marriages, I think. The Park was attainable under war conditions: rationed gas, and a 35 mph speed limit. The Grays lived across the ravine from our house. It took about as long for us to go there by way of the ravine, the short-cut, as to walk around by the road, the long-cut.

The Grays were definitely in Cleveland society. At one point they rented their charming house, filled with paintings and photographs from travel, to the then conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra, Arturo Rodzinski. Our connection with the orchestra was a notch down. The principal of the 2nd violins was my fiddle teacher, and his wife was Sue's piano teacher.

Don't think we knew much of Fleur after this period. Virginia was in college at Radcliffe, possibly a class ahead of me. There was a general rule, that one could not repaint one's dorm room. Virginia picked up a vegetable crate from a local grocery, made an elaborate show in the middle of her room of the partially

painted crate, placed on a newspaper to dry, a ruse to account for the smell of oil paint while she skillfully repainted the walls. Virginia was fastidious, had excellent taste, didn't suffer fools, but I don't think was happy.

Florence was much more outgoing. She was a good friend of John and Helen, and came to our Cambridge wedding all the way from Cleveland. I remember her enjoying meeting David's roommates, all WWII vets in grad school, in their unkempt apartment where they had prepared a lunch for our out-of-town guests. Florence enjoyed the scene thoroughly, and agreed with Stanley Myers, who bought old beef on the cheap from the butcher late on Saturday afternoons, because it was the better for being that much more aged.



This is a hillside at Mount Holyoke College. Late April? May? 1952.

Molly Bennett had driven David (Senior) and me (Sophomore) to South Hadley, to see Sue, then a Junior at Holyoke. It was a surprise holiday, "Mountain Day," marked by an early ringing of the college bell—no classes. We just happened to be there that day. Don't remember staying overnight.

Molly is Mother's younger half-sister and lived in Milton MA. She was a secretary to a Boston attorney, so I imagine that she had to have taken time off.

Don't remember the boy on the left, or who is missing to take this picture--Sue's classmate? Otherwise: from left to right, David, Peg, Sue, Molly, Molly's friend who came along.

Uncomfortable photo for me. David and I are the center of attention, talking together and not attending to others definitely un-included. Why not a proper circle? Really, Peg. Ah well.



The teacher is Miss Banick.

Sue sits in the 1st row 3rd from the left next to her good friend Margie Daggett.

When we moved to Baltimore in the middle of the year Sue cut Margie's head out of the class picture to put in her locket.



Grandma was Grace Elizabeth James, married to Lemuel Ransom Brown in 1903. And left to right, my aunties: Sylvia, Grace, Orpha, and Bertha.

Bertha here looks like her older self to me. Does she to you?

Bertha was lively, perky, and quick. Friendly with lots of laughter. She and Chuck were well-paired for almost all their lives together.



Pregnant with Steve, probably taken just before we left Cambridge in the late summer of 1961. We were staying with the Behrmans on Pemberton Street. Not sure about date of David's 'study' in the barn--probably just finishing his dissertation.

At Pemberton Street, David was working on text of "Mankind to Marlowe" before we left for Charlottesville and a whole new family. David delivered the text to the press and then we packed up a UHaul and drove (slowly) to 102 Minor Road. To close the doors on the UHaul, David and Ned had to take the air out of our bike tires.



We didn't know Ruby till Grandma gave us her photographs in 1962. I have liked to think about her and her dashing physician husband Pope, my grandfather's next-oldest sibling.

Pope was born in 1870, Lem born 1874. We heard about Pope Brown, an uncle known to John and his younger sibs. Of Ruby we only had a few details: Ruby Welch was born 17 Feb 1876. She lived in Hammond NY, a village set near but not on the St. Lawrence River, northeast of Alexandria Bay. Pope returned to Potsdam from Philadelphia with a 3-year MD degree from Penn's 'Medical Department' in 1894, and set-up his practice. He married Ruby in 1896. Is the portrait taken in 1896, when Ruby was 20? Two years later, their daughter Alice Welch Brown was born. After this, Ruby fades from view.

There is a photo of Pope, a faded? sun-bleached? snapshot: Pope on a porch swing, wearing his doughboy hat and holding an infant. Was he visiting Lem later in life? Which of Lem's children plays the infant? Sylvia? Grace, the youngest, Kathy Dorman's mother, born 1920?

Then I found, on the Internet, a summary of an interview of Pope, possibly from 1931. Pope had enlisted (at 47) in 1917, a 1st Lt in the US Medical Corps, with the 32nd division, in action at the front and later with the army of Occupation. He was discharged in June 1919.

In 1920, Ruby had a son! They named him Gary Brown. She turned 44 that year. I like to think that they were genuinely glad to be together again.



What is happening here?

If it is Florida, it was a trip in 1969 to take Helen to see Uncle Hunter (Bev's sister had married him—a favorite relative when David and Phil were boys). He was later a widower, retired to Florida, and flirting with Helen, or she with him, till he got serious and she dropped him.



A wonderful likeness of my father. I'll have to look up to find which of our children I am holding. Of course, that's Kate. At this age, they all look down to the fascinating world of children below. The 'aunt' is Dana Church, Mother's friend probably from Helen's attending events at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Dana worked there in the Education Department. Through Dana I got my first job, 50¢ an hour on Saturday mornings helping with the art classes. It is during Dana Church's tenure (and mine!) at the museum that the incident occurred concerning the vast canvas 'Le Vie' from Picasso's Blue Period.

I am sure I have told you that one.

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There were classes for 'Members' children (like John and Helen's girls) with varied scenes and tools--clay, pastels, pencils, poster paints. And classes for kids walking in without registration. In these classes, kids would pick up a drawing board and a camp stool, walk in groups to a gallery shepherded by a teacher and an 'assistant' like me. The assistant would carry a basket of mostly-broken crayons and enough newsprint to satisfy the need. The teacher would walk around the gallery, noting things interesting or surprising in the art, and then let the kids do as they wished with the crayons and newsprint.

I had learned all the positions, and so might be sent to any gallery with any teacher, with any class, as needed. One Saturday afternoon, after returning home, I got a call from Dana: "Peggy, were you in the modern gallery this morning?" "Well, yes."

An urchin had improved the lower part of La Vie with wax crayon. It is a large painting, just about 2.5 meters tall, so easily reachable from the floor... Oh help.

I don't know when I got back to the gallery, that Saturday or the next, but when I got there La Vie had been removed. When it was returned, there were no crayon improvements, though each time I see the painting, I search the skirts to make sure. But it also had a handsome wooden barrier, knee height, to keep visitors at a modest distance.



Both photos are from the fall of 1954-5.

Touro Street in Newport, RI.

The year I taught 2nd grade to 8 children at St Michael's
Country Day. David's 3rd Navy year.

Our digs had twin beds, pushed together.

See wood-work beneath David's book?

We slept mostly in the crevice.

(and there is Madame Matisse on the wall)

Photos were taken soon before the destroyer sailed to
the Mediterranean for 5 months.



Philip is on the rope swing. Summer 1965. I looked it up.
He seems to have been fond of those shorts that summer.



But why is it that I can tell you that the balding man is John Coolidge, scion of Boston nobility and very generous and friendly to us?

He and his wife had wanted us to use their Vermont cabin for a honeymoon complete with the loan of a car--in the rain, brakes pull to the right, but in dry weather to the left. I can tell you that, but have no memory of why the Coolidges would have paid any attention to us.

Memory is an odd business.

David Tyack's head and ear are to the right above just a hint of his bow tie. He was my David's friend from Exeter--sang barbershop together. How do I know his identity, with his face beyond the photo?

And the tall person greeting me--I think his name was Jim. How did we know him? Why was he there? A person who cared for us, supported us, took time for our wedding. I could at least remember why.



David Estes received his BA in History from Cornell University and MFA in Sculpture from California College of the Arts.

Ithaca NY

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