

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, May 14, 2007

Esther Shallcross Marshall (1885–1979): The *Weekly News* of May 15, 2006, told of my mother's family in the Middletown-Odessa area of Delaware. I never knew what to give my mother on Mother's Day; she gave me so much more than I could give back. When I was old enough to think I needed to know everyone's age, she told me she was 28, and I thought that seemed about right. It wasn't long, however, before my father told me she was 46, and he was the same age. It seemed right that he should be 46, but it was all wrong that my mother was that age. She must have been a young 46, as she lasted another 48 years.

In the summer of 1885, when my mother's older sister Mary, age nine, was called to the second-floor room at Belleview (the family farm) to see her baby sister for the first time, the baby's golden curls impressed her, and on my mother's 90th birthday in 1975, Aunt Mary, then 99, wrote in beautiful handwriting about baby Esther's curls. Eventually my mother had five siblings and she was number 4 of the total six. The average age of the six was 92 at the time of their deaths. She attended a one-room school about 1½ miles south of the Belleview Farm, and then Middletown High School, which ended with the 11th grade. About 1901, she was sent to a Quaker-oriented co-ed prep school at Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, where she met Anna Marshall, my father's sister, and they, along with three other girls, became lifelong friends (the five "Jays" were described in the *Weekly News* of March 13, 1906).

From the time my mother was graduated from Swarthmore Prep about 1903 until the beginning of World War I in 1914, she lived with her parents. Her oldest brother, James, had married in 1900, and Mary married Bassett Ferguson on the lawn at Belleview in 1906. The other three were also at home with their parents. About 1909 the family moved from Belleview to a property on North Broad Street in Middletown called Flowerdale. My grandfather died there two years later, following a bout with pneumonia and a lung operation that was not successful. My mother assisted the surgeon from Philadelphia who operated at Flowerdale, and I always thought this was why she became interested in being a nurse.

In the summer of 1912, Esther invited my father and his brother, Warren, and Warren's wife, Bertha, to join some of the Shallcrosses for an excursion to Rehoboth. I'm not sure whether Uncles Gene or Ned Shallcross owned an automobile, but I think Uncle Warren Marshall did. In any event, my father had a brand new 1912 Model 74 Stanley, and the Marshalls arrived at Flowerdale in Middletown, where Esther's mother had prepared lunch. My father took everyone's picture on the front porch at Flowerdale, and there are several photos of the happy young people on the beach at Rehoboth. Later that summer, chaperoned of course, my father invited Esther to go on a *long* trip in the Model 74 from Delaware to the White Mountains of New Hampshire and return. They also went to Atlantic City at least once in the Model 74, as we have a photo taken on the ferry slip at Penns Grove on the return. The romance must have cooled, but it did not go away.

In 1914 Esther entered the nursing school at Union Memorial Hospital in Baltimore, from which she was graduated in 1918 as World War I ended and the influenza epidemic engrossed the country. When she came home to Middletown for a short vacation, the local doctors, overwhelmed by the numbers of sick and dying, prevailed on this new registered nurse to stay home and help them. This she did, but just before Christmas 1918 (or possibly 1919), she contracted influenza herself and lay helpless at Flowerdale for several months. She and my father were engaged at the time. When the Warren Marshall family came to Auburn Heights for Christmas dinner, Aunt Bertha noticed that my father was depressed and almost silent. He knew, but the others did not, of Esther's illness. She recovered, however, and my parents were married in June 1921. Almost immediately she became "the nurse" for all the Yorklyn Marshalls. Even though I had to swallow castor oil and eat turnip greens, Swiss chard, parsnips, kale and spinach, I, too, am very glad she recovered, or this story could not have been written.