

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, May 26, 2008 Memorial Day

Meta, He's Beautiful! So exclaimed the female relatives of Meta Shallcross Day (1919–1999) in the front hall of Auburn Heights on a rainy Sunday in April 1950. She was introducing her six-week-old son, Robert B. Day Jr., to her parents, to her sisters and their families, and to her cousins, the Marshalls. The occasion was a party my mother had planned for her eldest brother, James T. Shallcross Jr. (1879–1972), and his, wife Elizabeth (Bess) (1877–1966), to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. They were invited for Sunday dinner, but the rest was a surprise. What could not have been a surprise, however, was my mother's arrangement to have me pick up Uncle Jay and Aunt Bess in front of the Marshall Brothers mill and bring them up the driveway to the porte cochere in my 1914 Stanley Model 607 to the delight of their offspring and their families. The flaw in this plan was the steady rain that was falling. With the top up on the Stanley, the honored couple complied with my mother's plan, and they were delivered on schedule, but the other guests were inside, and some of the planned excitement was lost.

Uncle Jay (his mother called him Jamie, his wife called him Jim, but to his siblings, he was Jay) met Aunt Bess, a Quaker from Byberry in Northeast Philadelphia, when they both attended Friends Central School in Philadelphia. By the time he was 18 or 19, he wanted to get married, but his father told him "not until you are 21," so dutifully they waited until 1900. His father (my grandfather), James T. Shallcross (1847–1911), was a successful farmer and Democratic politician who owned three large farms and a grist mill northwest of Odessa, Delaware. The elder Shallcross lived with his family on the Belleview Farm north of Shallcross Lake; his father, Sereck F. Shallcross (1816–1906), lived on a farm called Oakland south of the lake. Since Sereck was 84 and widowed when Jamie was married, the young couple moved into Oakland with Jamie's grandfather. Here, five daughters were born spanning a period of 16 years, Meta being the youngest. My mother, who was not married until after Meta was born, was very close to her five nieces, the second of whom was named for her. Uncle Jay was an especially successful farmer, and by the 1940s, he owned eight or 10 farms in the Odessa-Middletown area.

Number 4 daughter, Mary Comly (1915–1992), who preferred to be called "Comie," lived with us at Auburn Heights while attending Beacom College in Wilmington during the winter of 1933–34. That was the winter the 1½-story addition, with its new kitchen and recreation room, was built onto the rear of Auburn Heights. Comie had no trouble in attracting boyfriends. She usually went home to Oakland on weekends, and one of her boyfriends would often bring her back here on Sunday evening. It did them no good, however, as the next summer she met a young DuPont chemist named Donald Drake Coffman, and they were married at Old Drawyers Church near Odessa in September 1935.

Meta, number 5 of the Shallcross girls, went with my parents and me in our '37 Packard to the West Coast and the Canadian Rockies in the summer of 1941. She was just out of college and was preparing to teach in the suburbs of Philadelphia. I was just out of high school, but Meta and I had a lot of fun together. Meta married Robert B. Day in 1948, they took a flying boat from Baltimore to Bermuda (a six-hour trip one-way) for their honeymoon, and their only child, mentioned above, was born in February 1950.