

Audrey Mary Pletcher Woodard
b. 1919

Family History

My mother's name is Euphenia Gill. Everyone called her Effie. She was born in Collingswood, New Jersey and then moved to South Philadelphia. Dad was born out near Downingtown. When he worked for Western Union he had charge of the poles all along the railroad. Sometimes he would walk almost all the way to New Hope. We didn't have an electric train for years. I can remember when they sent out one car which was electric. It stopped at the Bethayres Station. All of the community couldn't wait to get into this electric train. Before that the trains ran on coal.

My dad had to keep the wires on the poles repaired. He had to walk and walk and walk. He would come home so tired. But then they got him the Western Union truck that he could keep all his supplies in. That's when he would park across the street at Traurigs. Powell's lived there before Traurigs. There was no garage to our house.

I was one of ten children, although my mother buried the baby. That was the last child. My brother Paul died when he was 8. Harry, Charlotte, Russell, Hammy, George, Paul, Walter, me and Elva. My sister Elva is two years younger than me and she now lives in Carversville. Now there is just the two of us left. Elva worked at the Budd Company and met her husband Norman there. She is alone now. Russell settled here, Ham lived in Hatboro, George lived on Paper Mill Road, and Walter and Marguerite lived on Valley View Road.

I thought that our house was the first house that was built on the east side of the Pike down at Welsh Road, but we were wrong. Franklin Peck, who was in my grade in school, told me that ours was the second house built. Originally there were no houses here. The only buildings across the street were the Huntingdon Valley Presbyterian Church up the hill and the house across the street from our house, the Traurig house. My father, Fred Pletcher, used to park his Western Union truck underneath the barn over there. My father worked for Western Union.

I was born on Philmont Avenue up above the corner where Pine Road comes in. The Philmont Country Club was on the left, then Pine Road, a couple of houses up, cross the railroad tracks to our house. I lived there until I was around 6. That area was always called Philmont. My birth certificate lists my town as Philmont.

Then we moved to the house on Huntingdon Pike. I always remember my first day at Red Lion School after we moved from Philmont. My mother said, "Now, when you get out of school today, you walk up to the Pike and then left down the Pike to our house." She was afraid I would get on the school bus. She said, "Just keep walking until you see me." So I kept on walking. "Where is mother, where is mother??" Down the Pike, there she was waiting for me.

Every New Year's Day my family would all get on the train and go into town to watch the Mummers' Parade. This was my family and relatives who still lived in South Philadelphia. After the parade, we would split up and go to one of the relatives' homes for soup. Everyone made big kettles of homemade soup. After the parade, you wanted hot soup because you were freezing to

death! It certainly warmed us up. I have a picture of us at the parade. Elva and I are the children in the warm hats.

My father was only making \$15 a week and then my aunt, his sister, came to stay with us. The house was big. Had an upstairs, and on the first floor it had a parlor where we kept the coal stove for heat. To go to bed you went up a long stretch of steps.

At Christmas our parents made us line up on those steps and wait. Elva and I were always together in one room. I can still see my mother sitting with a huge dishpan full of potatoes by the kitchen window. She would peel the potatoes and look out the window. I especially remember her doing this on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

My sister and I used to babysit up in Bryn Athyn. My sister worked for Ted Doering. She would stay with them right across the street from the house that I stayed in to watch the kids every Friday night for the Friday Night Supper. I worked for the Prices. My sister would sleep overnight, and sometimes I would too. Maybe we got a couple bucks for a couple of days work.

My father was in the fire company. When he heard the whistle go off, he would hurry down to the corner (Huntingdon Pike and Welsh Road) to direct traffic.

I used to go swimming in the Pennypack. And when the park got flooded, the water came across the Pike so bad that they had to take a boat down to the train station. Once the flooding was so bad Ginna Montanye stood on her front porch and dove into the water, the water was that high. Her mother was postmistress. They lived on the corner of Chestnut Street. Her house was right next to the taproom there.



Russ was in that accident where the Festa boy was killed, the accident down at Welsh Road and Terwood Road. Russ's clothes were frozen stiff. They couldn't find him for a while. He was thrown from the car onto the frozen Pennypack Creek.

[Photo: Chief Russell Pletcher, Lower Moreland Township Police Department, pictured here during World War II years with Officer Andy Harkins of the Abington Police Department on the left. The two gentlemen in the middle are unknown]

Life Around the Valley

In Odd Fellow's Hall, there used to be Christmas parties for children. Poor children. Back then, people were struggling.

At the holidays Ellis Gimbel, who owned the Philmont Country Club, would bring all the orphans out on busses from the city. Every orphanage from the city of Philadelphia, it seemed,

came out to the Country Club. And when it got cold, Ellis Gimbel gave all the orphans jackets! Also wrapped gifts, plenty of food. My mother would be peeling potatoes watching the orphans go by in the buses. Ellis Gimbel was so good to these kids, and he shared so much. There was a house there and a pole with a light on it. They would grease that pole and someone would put money on the top with a nail to hold the money. You should see those kids shinny up that pole. Now in the summer, all Jewish people would come out to the Country Club to stay for visits. There must have been nice rooms for them to stay in. Many brought their dogs with them, and my brother would take care of their dogs when the owners were playing golf and doing whatever they wanted to do.

We used to go all the way over to Frankford Avenue to buy clothes. I remember McMahon's place right behind the general store where we bought food. We would walk up to Doc Brown's drug store for treats! Elva and I and Virginia Montanye. Sometimes a couple of boys from Southampton or Bryn Athyn would be there, and we would talk to them outside the drug store. People would talk! That was not good back then. I used to think, "What harm are you doing talking to two boys out in the open?"

I always remember Tiny Cooper Redmile who lived in Bryn Athyn. She liked Tom Redmile, a Lower Moreland boy. If Tiny was near the South Avenue loop with Tom, she would always make a run for it around the "loop" so her dad wouldn't see her with Tom. We always talked about her dad. Tom used to ride his brother's huckster truck. All the people wanted me to marry Tom. That went through Bryn Athyn like I don't know what. Sometimes he would take me down to the football games in Philadelphia. I met Tiny when I lived at Prices. Tiny lived on the opposite side of the street. That's how I knew Tiny.

Do you remember Foley's store down the Pike? Well, we would shop there. If Foley didn't have an item he used to call up to Soneson's Store in Bryn Athyn and send someone up to get the item.

High School Comes to an End

After I graduated from high school in 1937 I stopped babysitting, I had a sister-in-law who worked in the knitting mill down in Rockledge. Made hosiery. She got me a job and I worked there for a while.



[Photo: Mary's Lower Moreland High School graduation photo, 1937]

Then Brewsters in Johnsville needed help, so I went up there and got a job right away. worked as an airplane mechanic at the Brewster Aeronautical Corporation. During the war they were short on men, so they trained me there. At Brewsters you would get up inside the planes. It was interesting and better than working in the stocking mill.

Why did I join the service? Well, I wanted to get out from everything. You know, you go steady with a fellow and this and that. I was maybe 20. After I worked at the stocking mill in Rockledge, I took the bus from Black's Garage down the Pike, and worked at Brewster's, I wanted to do something different.



Audrey M. Fletcher, S2/c, Spars, has been transferred to the Coast Guard Air Station at Elizabeth City, N.C. Says Mary: "I'm fine and very happy. I am now working in the Propeller Shop. After the planes have been up so many hours the prop is taken off and serviced. That is what I am learning to do. The work is very interesting and of course I am in my glory being able to live right here at the base beside the planes. I am the first Spar to work in the Prop Shop. "We live in barracks, but they are of the very best. The bunks have inner-spring mattresses and are they comfortable! It's just like being in civilian life and working for Brewster's. I report for work at 8 A.M. and work until 4 with an hour off for lunch. All the rest of the time is my own with a 4-hour pass every week and a 48-hour leave every month. We are a 2-hour ride from Norfolk and can go there quite often. We have movies, sail boating, tennis and a swimming pool all here on the station. The cooks are excellent, so we are being well fed."

Once I took a plane from Elizabeth City. It took off in water and landed in water somewhere in New York. I was the only woman on the plane. They said, "Hold tight!" because they had a bad landing the day before. I was scared to death. I should have landed in Willow Grove but by mistake I landed somewhere in New York. So I said to this fellow that was there, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm headed for Philadelphia." I was so happy. I asked him if I could hang on with him. He said, "Sure." So we hitchhiked it down as far as Oxford Circle. All of a sudden I knew where I was, so I called out, "Let me out, let me out, I know where I am!"

And so after I got out, I knew where to stand for a bus to Fox Chase. I stood there, got the bus to Fox Chase. It cost me a dime. When I got to Fox Chase, who was driving a bus from Fox Chase up to Southampton but my brother George! He said, "What are you doing here. You are supposed to be in Willow Grove!" I said "No I'm not. I am right here and I am going home!" So that whole trip only cost me a dime.

[Photo: "What Goes On" article about Mary]

Legally, I am still Audrey Mary. I never found that out until I got my diploma from high school. All of those who went to school with me called me Mary. But when I needed to get my birth certificate for something, I went to my brother Russell and he took me to Al Taxis, a lawyer who was the minister's son. He said, "Don't worry about it. I'll get it for you in no time. I'll just tell them that you are the same person, even though everyone calls you Mary." But I told him to make it out to Audrey, and that's what he did.

I went down to Philadelphia when I made up my mind I was going in the service. I was going to join the Marines. But the Marines had a quota for women, and couldn't take any more women. So I said to them, "If you hadn't gotten in, what would be your second pick?" I was told to go in the Coast Guard, right across the street. I went, entered the Coast Guard, came home and told my mother. She was a little upset about it but my brother Ham was in the service. It wasn't unusual for me to think about going in the service because I knew women when I worked at Brewsters who went into the service. I worked on airplanes there. But in the Coast Guard they wouldn't let the "SPARS", us women, work on the airplanes. Back then there were no benefits when you retired.

Married Life

My husband went home after leaving the service to see his father. His mother had passed away when he was young. Then he hitchhiked all the way up here so he would be here with me. It was so cold that night that he hitchhiked, he said to himself, "If the next guy who comes along doesn't pick me up, then I'm turning around and going home!" He got picked up!

Audrey Fletcher, S2/c, Spars Married in Local Church

Audrey Mary Fletcher, S 2/c, Spars, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Fletcher, of Bethayres, and John E. Woodard, SC 3/c also of the Coast Guard, were married at 7 P.M. on December 28 in the Huntingdon Valley Presbyterian Church by the Rev. Dr. Alfred L. Taxis, pastor of the church.



December 28, 1944 was when John and I were married. My husband was in the Coast Guard, same as me. He went back to his home in Hamlet, North Carolina and hitchhiked to come up here. I came home on leave and told my mother, "Mother, I'm going to get married. If you do not approve, I will get married on the base." I made up my mind. I was old enough. She said, "Oh no, you're going to be married here, you're coming home." So all of her relatives, even those who lived in South Philadelphia, all came to the Huntingdon Valley Presbyterian Church on the train for my wedding. After the wedding, the photographer thought he had made a mistake, so we had to walk back up the hill from our house to the church to retake more pictures.

[Photo: "What Goes On" article about Mary's marriage]

We lived in an apartment in a house on Beechwood Road in Southampton at first near Gravel Hill Road. It was all farmland. Our daughter Sandy was six when we moved from there to here. She's 60 now.



Remember the school fire in 1967? Ellen Redmile called me at 5:00 in the morning. She asked me if I was coming to work. I wondered why she called so early! Then she said, "You better get down here right away, the school is on fire!" I drove down there in a hurry. There we were, all crying! Then we had to move up to the Methodist Church and classes were there. I wasn't a teacher, I was a helper. Charlie Shafer was Vice Principal then.

[Photo: Lower Moreland Middle School fire,
October 1967]