

**Margaret Trotter Henderson**

**Josephine Trotter Jefferson**

**b. 1930**

**1931-2009**

Note: Margaret's information begins with these histories. Josephine joined Margaret at the end.

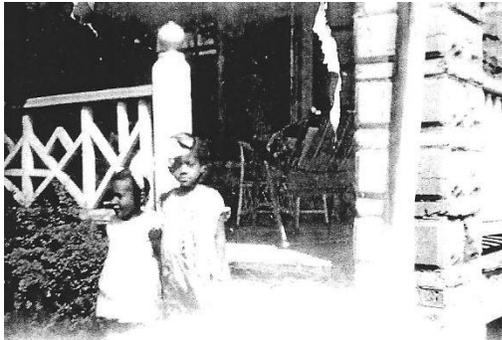
### **Family History**

My mother was a Barrett, Edith Barrett. My mother's brother was Franklin's father, Russell Barrett. Shepard, Ollie, and Ted were my uncles. My mother was the youngest of 13. Several girls died early from influenza back in 1916-1918. In my own family there were four girls and one boy, Margaret (me), Josephine, Edith, Richard, and Delphine. The photo of all of us was taken when my brother retired from the post office, 40 years in Jenkintown. A "cousin", Marguerite, we later discovered was our fifth sister, but not raised with us. She grew up on Snell Avenue with Aunt Delphine.

My dad was Bagley Trotter. He was from Virginia. My mother was born up here but not my dad. My dad came up here to get a job. Everyone did that then. His first job was a cook at Penn State Ogontz. Back then it was a school for girls. I don't know how he met my mother or where they were married.

My sister and I were born at home. Actually, my aunt and uncle lived down on Chestnut Street, and I was born there. There was a doctor.

I never had a birth certificate. I had to use my records from the school in order to get one. My sister had to do that too. My other sisters and brother were born at Abington Hospital.



[Photo: Left to right, Josephine and Margaret]

My mother's father, Shepherd, my grandfather, had a farm around here. My grandfather died before I was born. My uncles didn't finish school because they had to work on the farm. My mother talked about how her uncles would sled all the way down to the center of town (Bethayres). Because more cars were on the road when I was young, we used Anne Street for sledding. That would be blocked off.

I had family all around. And with my father being born in Virginia, every year after school closed, we would go down there and stay all summer until we got older. We stayed with my grandmother and grandfather on their farm. They raised tobacco and had cows, pigs, chickens. My aunt, Delphine Case, lived on Snell Avenue. Now Chestnut Street is gone. So is Snell Avenue.

## **A Hard Working Family**

My dad did not own a car. He worked at the Leedom Coal Yard down the Pike. He was a coal man. He walked to work. Afterwards he worked for the Reading Railroad. Then he retired from there and worked here driving school buses.

When we were young my mother took in laundry. We had a wringer washing machine. The wash was hung outside. Then she would iron everything. Wash was everywhere. I remember one man who had many shirts. Now my mother was good at ironing, but our aunt could iron shirts so perfectly. No hangers. Just folding. She ironed the back yoke first, then the sleeves, then cuffs, then the front and back and lastly the collar. Her men's shirts looked so smooth, not a wrinkle. And we made our own starch. There was ARGO starch, a hard block. You would put it in water to dissolve it. No permanent press back then. Everything got starched.

With washing our own clothes, my mother would always do the white clothes first, then the colored clothes would be last. Same water! Somehow the clothes got clean. It was a wringer washer. My sister caught her hand in the wringer once all the way up her arm. She went to the doctor. Turns out she was all right, no broken bones. There was a safety pedal on the washer. Mother always warned us about this.

My mother was always home when we came home from school. Then when we were older, she attended nursing school and became a practical nurse. My mother first started her practical nursing job in Douglas Hospital, then Jeanes Hospital. She worked for 23 years there.

## **Where we Lived**

We lived down in Bethayres at first. The railroad tracks to Trenton used to go through the town across the Pike. Then they built the bridge. We were on the road that went down the other side of the Pike. Campolis lived there. Also the Raglins and Joyce Johnson. When I started school, we



[Photo: Huntingdon Pike grade crossing]

moved up to Murray Avenue, so I must have been around 6 years old. I don't remember much about when we lived down off the Pike, just coming to Sunday School (at the First Baptist Church on Murray Avenue). Agnes Raglin would hold our hand and bring us up the Pike and then take us home. If a train was coming we would have to wait for the flagman. I don't remember his name.

We moved in 1936. Where was our house? The driveway of the Murray Avenue School next to the First Baptist Church was where our house was. (True Reformer's Hall was on the other side of the church). Our house was like a boarding house. There were four families living in there. The house was large. In one room lived Catherine Lucas and her mother. She went to school here. On the

third floor were two rooms, and two men lived up there. The second floor had 3 bedrooms and that was where we lived. No bathrooms. The outhouse was out back. A pump for water. There was a shed inside where we got water.

To take a bath, my mother would warm water in a pot on the stove in the downstairs kitchen and put it in a big two handled metal washtub there. She would start with my brother. There were four of us in the household. He would bathe first. Then she would add more water and the next sister went. I was the oldest, so I went last. The leftover water was emptied outside.

My mother used to swim in the Pennypack. She was even baptized in the Pennypack. She said there were snakes there.

We were the only ones who used the kitchen. I don't know what the others did. But later, we were the only ones in the house. It was a big house, three stories. Large rooms. Later on, my dad cut a room in half and made a bathroom out of the one side. Luxury! Downstairs there was a living room, dining room, kitchen, shed. Eventually my parents bought the house. They sold it to the school board, and the School District tore it down and replaced it with a driveway and parking lot.

## Growing Up

I was eleven years old when WWII broke out. Franklin's brother went to Europe. My father was rejected because he had so many children. We had practice air raids. We would sit together in one room. My father was an Air Raid Warden. He wore a uniform and attended meetings. We had blackout frames that my dad put up at the windows. We listened to the radio. There was one soap opera my mother listened to, Stella Dallas. We had one radio and we sat on the floor to listen. Every night we listened to the news. Then we had to be in bed by 7:00 or 8:00. We took a bath on Saturday night and washed up with a basin every night.

On Friday nights and Saturdays we had chores. Our mother worked at the Budd plant from 3 to 11, and we had to help around the house. We had to finish the chores before we could do anything else. Each of us was given a room to clean. That meant scrubbing the linoleum floor. No rugs.

But after we were done the chores, we would go to the movies in Jenkintown. Take the train to Noble and walk up to the Hiway Theater. The train was maybe 5 cents, the movie maybe 25 cents. And being Black we had to sit in the left hand side. There would be cartoons, a newsreel, and a movie. Casablanca and a movie where Betty Davis played twins. Cowboy movies. Sundays would be church.



Sunday dinner was always the same thing. In the winter it was fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, and in the summer it was fried chicken, potato salad. The chickens were from Pastores. We were sent to the Pastores to get the chickens. When we got there, Mrs. Pastore would ask, "How many chickens do you want?" We would say, "Our mom wants two." Then Mrs. Pastore would go out and get two live chickens, put each one in that funnel thing with the neck sticking down and cut the neck and let all the blood run out. Then she would wrap them in newspaper and put them in a bag. My mother always had a pot of hot water waiting. She would put the chickens in the hot water so she could pick off the feathers and things. The chickens would still be warm when we brought them home! We watched all this. We would also get eggs there, freshly laid!

I remember a man with a funny blue truck who came around selling clothing. Milk was delivered to our house. We had an ice box. We had to take turns emptying the pan of water under the ice box. My Uncle Shep was the iceman. No, I don't know where he got the ice from. In the summer we had to hang our wash on the line. This was a big job. My father had a garden. My mother would buy fruit from the huckster and can it.

### Family Activities

We would go to Willow Grove to Lit Brothers and Snellenbergs. We took the train to Noble, then took the 55 bus to Willow Grove. We would walk from Noble up the hill to Jenkintown to the stores. Every Saturday after my father got paid, my mother would take all of us on the train to Jenkintown to food shop. Each of us had a bag of groceries to carry. Sometimes we would get the bus from Bethayres up the Pike to Murray Avenue. Saturday routine. In between, shopping was done at Clayton's Store for milk, bread. My mother had a tab. She would pay the tab on Saturdays. It was, "Put it on the tab" when she sent us on errands there. The post office used to be in the store. Brown's Drug Store, my uncle Ted was my mother's brother, he was the soda jerk.

We used to go to Willow Grove Park for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Memorial Day, Labor Day. But you had to be back to Noble station before 11:30 at night so as not to miss the last train to Bethayres. The 55 Trolley, the fare was five cents, went up the right side of York Road after we got off the train at Noble. The trolley had tracks on both sides of York Road. The tracks turned around for the

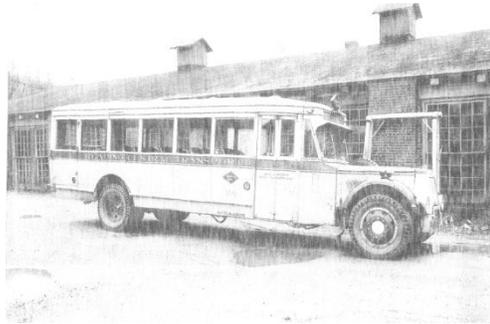


trolley at Willow Grove right near where Papa John's Pizza is today. There was a tunnel under York Road for you to walk across to the park. The trolley came from Cheltenham Avenue and had open sides. At the park we would go on the Alps roller coaster and sit on the benches at the bandstand listening to John Philip Sousa's band.

[Photo: Advertisement for Willow Grove Park]

Sometimes we would go to Philadelphia and eat at the Horn & Hardart's Restaurant. There were separate sections for us there. You just could not sit anywhere. We would go in to see the Thanksgiving Parade.

We could also get a bus right at the corner of Murray and the Pike to go to the Bethayres train station. Then we would get the train to Philadelphia. We did not have to sit in the back of the bus around here, but if you went into Philadelphia, you sat in the back of the bus.



[Photo: Local bus service]

I remember the bus from Fox Chase. A couple of times we missed the last one and had to walk home from Fox Chase. Up those hills. They are not there now. That was bad enough in the warm weather, but in the cold weather there was no place to stop to warm up. My mother said we had to keep moving, so we did! A long walk.

We went to Germantown to have our hair done. I can't remember what kind of car we had. We always took the bus. We went to a hairdressing shop for Blacks. We would take the bus to Fox Chase, then the 26 trolley. We would only get our hair cut a couple of times a year – Christmas, Easter. In between, my mother would trim our hair. We washed our hair in the kitchen sink.

### School Years

The May Day celebration at Red Lion School was a festive occasion. There was the traditional May Pole. Josephine, because she was short, was part of that activity and remembers the beautiful pattern that the ribbons wrapped on the pole. They wanted the girls who did that



activity all to be the same size so it would be easier to lift the ribbons over and under everyone. We didn't walk, either – we skipped. It took practice to make it come out even. And we wore white blouses and cotton print skirts. As part of the court, I walked with the May Queen and sat in the bleachers to watch all the activities, races and May Pole. The girls in the court all wore evening gowns, all pastel colors, and carried flowers from gardens.

[Photo: Margaret's First Grade class]

My classmate John Bower drew a picture with cartoon sketches with our names of all of our high school classmates. He worked as an architect on the Gallery in Philadelphia. I still have it. Quite

something. Everyone in the class got one of these. Some of the Lower Moreland familiar names are Tommy Ewald who lived in the historic Fetters Mill, Dot Pletcher, Betty Hewitt.

My mother went to Lower Moreland too. But there was not a 12<sup>th</sup> grade then so she graduated from the 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

I was the girl who went on the senior class trip to Washington. I have the picture of our class in Washington, 1948. I was the only black student in the class. Mr. White and Miss Young were the chaperones. Miss Young taught typing, stenography, the commercial course. Mr. Robinson was the football coach. Miss Crowe taught me English.

This is how the class trip to Washington went. I used to work after school for a lady who lived on the Pike. Montgomery was the name. I saved my money to use for the class trip. I would wash dishes, make her bed, fix her dinner, clean up the kitchen. When hockey and basketball season came, she told me I could just come on Fridays when I didn't have practice. She didn't want to interfere with the games and practices.

So then the trip came. It was the yearly thing, seniors go to Washington, D.C. I always wanted to go to Washington. I put my name down, gave the money and didn't think anything about it. We would be there from Thursday to Monday. The principal, Mr. Hoke, called me to his office and said, 'You know, Margaret, when you go, you won't be able to stay with your class at the hotel'. I said, "That would be all right." But I didn't know I couldn't eat with them. All he said was that I wouldn't be able to stay with them.

So we went down there. The Dunbar Hotel, a Black hotel, in Washington was where I stayed, by myself, no chaperones. The chaperones were with the others in the other hotel. I couldn't sleep because I was so nervous. I was afraid someone would break in the room. I had breakfast which I couldn't eat because I felt all jittery.



The bus would pick me up every morning and we would go on tours. I think it was at Mt. Vernon that we stopped at a restaurant. Everyone got off the bus, but as I got off the bus, the bus driver said, "You can't go in there. They will bring the meal out to you." So I sat alone. The kids didn't know. They all were ahead of me after the driver spoke to me. There was this lady who brought me the food, but I was so upset I couldn't eat it. When the kids returned, they asked me where I was. I said, "Sitting in the bus." They had no clue and were so upset. They all told me that if they had known, they would not have gone on the trip. I felt sorry for Mr. Hoke. He tried. He knew.

[Photo: Bus advertisement]

All the students on the trip were my friends. Betty Hewitt was my good friend. Lois Warner, May Huster, Gladys Lodge. John Bower, Joe Messina, Nancy Hoke. We had students from

Rockledge in our school back then. Now, every three months, about 14 of us from this class of '48 go to lunch. We've been doing it for years. Like a mini class reunion. We've been out of school almost 60 years. Many of my classmates stayed in this area.

### **Graduation and off to Work**



In high school I took the academic course, thinking I would go to nursing school when I graduated. Latin, geometry, all that. But my parents just couldn't afford to send me to college. So I worked at Strawbridge's department store. Not as a salesperson. Back in those days there were no Black salesclerks. I worked as a stock person. You either worked in housekeeping, kitchen services or as an elevator operator. I worked back in the sportswear stockroom. When shipments came in, I would record them and then take them up for display on the counters.

[Photo: Margaret's Lower Moreland High School 1948 yearbook photograph]

### **The Way Things Were**

Our family didn't talk about the race issues. We were just taught what to do and what not to do. I took it in stride. Didn't really think about it. That was how it was, and you just had to abide by it. In those days, we used to go with my uncle and aunt in their car to Virginia. You couldn't stop at a gas station and use the bathroom. You had to stop "down the road".

My grandparents (father's parents) lived in a remote area in Kenbridge, Virginia. There were no race problems there. But if you went into the town to go to the movies, you had to buy your ticket at a ticket office in the back of the theater, go up the backstairs, and sit in the back by the projector. The projector made so much noise, you couldn't hear. You couldn't buy candy there either.

On trains, we had to sit behind the engine. We'd be covered with the soot, and it would be hot and noisy. You couldn't go in the dining room on the train.

I did go to Somerton Springs swimming pool with the class, and nothing happened there. We used to have Sunday School picnics every year at Dorney Park. The pools were always empty. They would tell us that the pools were being cleaned.

The only time I felt bad about the Black situation was when kids would call me names. Miss Neilson and Mrs. Markley and Miss Williams were my early teachers. The only thing about the school was that I was left handed. Miss Williams didn't let me use my left hand. When she left the room I would use my left hand. She would hit me with a pointer. I failed penmanship. When I went to Miss Neilson's class, she said, "I don't care what hand you write with. Just get the work done."

Vivian Freeman's class had many more Black families. These families had to move when the Township started building housing developments and the expansion of schools in the areas where we lived. Then to buy another house in Lower Moreland was too expensive. The families left Huntingdon Valley.

My cousin is Jerry Thompson and his father introduced me to my husband. This was my second marriage. We were married for 38 years. My husband died in 1998. I have four children. Two live in Texas, one in North Carolina, and one in Jenkintown. I have a stepdaughter in Virginia. I have ten grandchildren and a great-grandson in the second year of Penn State.



[Photo: Margaret, date unknown]

I lived in McKinley and then in Jenkintown. My husband was from Willow Grove. And that's where I live now. My oldest child was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade when we moved from here to Jenkintown. There were more Black children in Jenkintown. Most came from Willow Grove. My house is right next to the house where my parents lived.

Vivian Freeman gives me piano lessons. Nothing fancy. I have a piano. My daughter took piano lessons from the nuns in the Catholic church across from us in Jenkintown. When she got married she moved to Texas. So to ship the piano to Texas would cost \$800. I said, "No way!" We sent her money to buy her own piano and we kept the piano. I stopped playing when I was a youngster. I'm sorry I didn't continue back then. I enjoy the lessons.

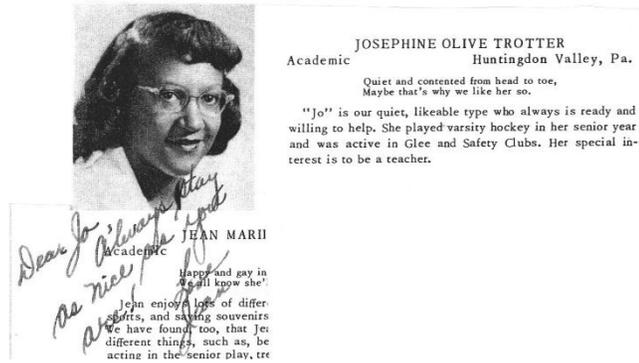
I had a good life. My classmates were very, very good to me. I can't remember visiting my classmates in their houses when I was in school. If I did it was for a party. I went to the movies with my family. My classmates would go to the mountains in the summer, or down the shore, and I went to my grandparents in Virginia.

### **Josephine Trotter Jefferson**

Although I was born in Huntingdon Valley, my husband and I lived in Elkins Park after we married. I worked at Frederick's for over ten years. I was married right after high school and had three daughters and a son. Then I worked at Bonwit Teller, Stouffers, Vicks-Hatboro, Strawbridge's. I retired after working from Prudential. My husband worked in Bryn Athyn on the grounds crew at the Cathedral for 40 years. Today the lawn doesn't look as good as it did years ago when my husband worked on it. It was like a green carpet then! Now they don't allow photographs there anymore.

I took my driver's test in Doylestown. I learned how to drive on a stick shift. I was never good with that. I could only go backwards, not forwards. Margaret took her test on a stick shift. I think the car was a Chevy. She took the test five times before she passed!

For Christmas we would make construction paper chains with the white paste. Huge tree! Would touch the ceiling. My father waited until the last minute to get the tree because it would be cheaper. We still do the tree on Christmas Eve. And when it came to presents, what we asked for we didn't get! But we did get one present each. One Christmas, Margaret got a doll, and I got the doll coach. I remember I was going outside with the doll coach, and as I went out the door, the coach went off the porch and the doll fell out and cracked the head. In our family you either got one or the other, never both. We just couldn't afford it.



[Photo: Josephine's Lower Moreland High School yearbook photograph]

Never got a bicycle. Only our brother got the bicycle. Mostly the presents were underwear and other clothes. We always had a big Christmas dinner mostly with just our family. My mother would go to the aunts' houses to make cookies and divide them up. We still have the original metal cookie cutters, bells, stars, Christmas tree, reindeer. No icing, just sprinkles. Also pinwheel type designs.

We used to sew our own clothes. We had a sewing machine. Goldberg's in Jenkintown was where we bought the fabric and patterns. We also could get these at the 5 & 10 Cent store in Jenkintown. For Easter and Christmas our aunt would make our dresses. Black patent leather shoes, a bonnet, and gloves especially for our Christmas program at church.

We had to help with the cooking. Mashed potatoes, big pots of beans, soups. Things like that. We always had a dessert, rice pudding, tapioca pudding, Jell-O, applesauce. My father used to cook breakfast every single Sunday. Bacon, eggs, fried potatoes and onions, cocoa, corn fritters, grapefruit all sectioned with a cherry on top. We would be responsible for doing the dishes. We each took a turn. We were on a rotation.

We played outside all the time. No bicycles. Couldn't afford them. Our brother finally got one, being the only boy. None for us girls.

My father had a beautiful garden but we all had to weed it! Back there during the war everyone had a Victory garden. String beans, squash, tomatoes. He made root beer too. In the jars. My mother would can things too, peaches from the hucksters, string beans, pears. Kept the jars in a big closet in the dining room. Our grandmother would send up a big 100 pound bag of potatoes from Virginia. My dad put the bag on the third floor. He spread paper out on the floor and laid the potatoes on the paper so they wouldn't rot. My grandmother would send us big bags of flour too.

Dr. Smith was our dentist in Ambler. Two trains needed to go to him. One to Jenkintown, and then the Lansdale local. He was the only Black dentist in the area. He would give you Novocain in a big long needle.



I have four children, six grandchildren and one great grandchild. My husband Benjamin and I live in the McKinley section of Elkins Park. My daughter Connie just recently died from an accident. She was thrown from a horse and died of complications from that. My son Brent lives in California and Brenda lives in Minnesota. My other daughter Yolanda lives around here.

[Photo: Benjamin and Josephine]

### Trotter Family

Parents: Bagley Trotter *b.* 02/25/1906  
Edith M. Barrett Trotter *b.* 07/07/1908

Children: Margaret Trotter Phifer Henderson *b.* 08/27/1930  
Josephine Trotter Jefferson *b.* 12/13/1931  
Edith Trotter *b.* 03/25/1933  
Richard Trotter *b.* 08/06/1935  
Delphine Trotter *b.* 12/24/1943

Family doctor: Dr. Reginald Pinckney, Willow Grove, PA  
Family dentist: Dr. Smith, Ambler, PA

Margaret's school activities: Hockey (left wing), Basketball (Right Guard),  
Drama Club, School Chorus.