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November 13, 1991

Dear Aunt Honey,

I'm writing to you as part of my homework assignment in a class I'm taking called "Roots and Recollections." As you know, I've been interested in family history and now, because of this class, I'm writing about my own lifetime of history.

My assignment is to write an interview letter, to fill in the gaps of some details I might have missed about an event or a person. Right now, I'm trying to write about Grandma Olson and I am unsure of the chronology of the events in her life (specifically during the years 1955 until her death). If you could answer the following questions, I'd be grateful.

1. I remember that Grandma worked sometimes, but not all the time. Where did she work, and was she working because they needed the money or because she wanted to work outside the home?

2. How long had she been involved in Eastern Star? Was she Worthy Matron after Grandpa died, but before she married Lee?

3. Correct the following chronology and give me approximate dates:

- Grandpa died (Aug. 21, 1964)
- Cancer? Hysterectomy? Mastectomy? (Which came first?)
- Met & Married Lee.
- More operations?

4. I think I have a pretty good sense of all the turmoil and stress in the family that winter of 1969 (especially since we talked about it when we were together at Stratford), with Annette's lump, Mom's fibroids, Grandma Piper's death (did we know her death was imminent?) and Grandma's cancer. Would it be fair to say that most of these misfortunes happened about the same time?

My goal is to write some images of Grandma as I remember her, helping me to learn to sew and knit, patiently watching me cook & mess up her kitchen, and walking with her in the woods and garden. Even though I was 13 when she died, I'm having trouble remembering specifics -- I seem to only remember cloudy images, but strong emotions -- love, patience, caring.

It sure is hard to take this class some days, with all these walks down memory lane, but I hope it will be worthwhile for my great grandchildren to know about life in the "olden days."

Thanks a million for your help -- no big hurry about returning this, but within the next few weeks would be nice.

*Lynn*

15 November 1991

Dear Lynn,<sup>1</sup>

I've got a thousand things to do, but none of them seem very important in light of the most recent family scare,<sup>2</sup> so I'm delighted to have your letter to answer. (So who needs doors, varnished or otherwise, on their bathrooms anyway?) I'm so delighted that you are working on family stories, for lots of reasons, one of them being that it removes some of the sense of responsibility that I've had that I should be working at it harder and faster.

I have written a couple of "pieces" that relate in a somewhat fictional way some of the family tales. I also have a couple of partly finished, or started, pieces. Annette has also written some of the same tales, but in a much more fictionalized manner. (They're also better as literary works than mine.) It occurs to me that we could produce a nice Christmas present in a couple of years by putting yours and ours in a book with perhaps some illustrations by Kathryn and Debbie. Vanity Press is so much easier these days than it used to be.

So, to get to your questions:

Actually, I have one more funny observation. When I read "Grandma Olson," I thought of my grandmother and couldn't make much sense of your questions at first! (I got your letter the day of my brother John's surgery, so I wasn't in the best of shape to comprehend anything but anxiety.) Now you're going to have to deal with my "Mom" and "Mother."

1. WORK

Obviously, Mom didn't work much before she was married. She was a sort of live-in baby-sitter for the Cook family in Alpena while she went to High School, I think mostly to pay for part of her room and board. I can't resist adding details, so you might find interesting that she read the complete Shakespeare at the Cook house when she was only fourteen, because the only books they seemed to have were a fancy leather-bound Shakespeare set which no one seems to have read. You may recall that Shakespeare remained a life-long love of hers and she had large sections memorized. When I began to study Shakespeare seriously (in college), I was constantly delighted at running into passages I'd heard all my life while helping to clean or make beds.

I think Mom and Aunt Helen worked briefly at Lost Lake Woods Clubhouse as teenagers and got fired. I don't know details, but will try to remember to ask Aunt Helen. As I recall, she finds them rather amusing.

Mother didn't work "outside the home" until my junior year in high school. During our entire childhoods, however, she did pick berries (10 cents a quart) and would occasionally take in sewing. She was usually quite frustrated by the latter, because "good church people" tended to ask her to do jobs for them under the guise of helping her and then paid her very poorly for excellent work. Mother did not take kindly to condescending cheapskates, even though she rarely challenged them. During those years we also sold spare produce (especially potatoes, strawberries, and tree fruit--

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<sup>1</sup> I wrote this in response to a letter from my niece, Lynn Cubalo Vander Linde, whose family pieces also appear here.

<sup>2</sup> Brother John Olson's cancer surgery.

apples, pears, plums, apricots), cream, and chickens. I'm sure that by the time you can remember, our farm cash crop was pulp wood.

Mother decided to look for a job when I was about 15 (1953 or 54). There were several reasons for this. First, she thought Daddy had been struggling to support us on his own long enough and she wanted to help. She also had long since hit the point that no matter how many projects she laid out for herself, the winters were getting too boring. Later on, I'll try to tell you about some of her projects and community service. Then, if John and I were to go to college, more money had to be coming in. Finally, Mom was getting anxious about the fact that she had no work history and as she hit her forties, she felt she would be too vulnerable if she waited any longer to get some work skills.

Having made that decision, the first thing she and Daddy did was to go to Grandma and Grandpa Piper to explain why Mom would be going to work. Up until that time, the only woman in the family to work was Aunt Maysie. They anticipated disapproval, but both Grandma and Grandpa, as I recall, were supportive. In fact, I think Grandma said that she wished she could have done the same thing. Grandpa probably responded with "Now Mae."

One concern that both Mom and Dad had about Mom working was Johnny. He was only about 10 and they were sure that left alone, he would "wander." They asked me not to work summers so that someone could be home with John. In theory, that was a good idea, but in practice, I think Johnny resented it enormously. I don't think we ever explained it properly to him, so he concluded that I was "free-loading" and bossing him around. I didn't help the situation by feeling that any arrangement I worked out with my parents was none of his business. (Aren't teenagers wonderful?) I did do all of the washing and cleaning and most of the cooking during those summers. My brothers' stories aside, I did a fairly decent job of getting meals that were edible on the table. They just remember the ones that weren't!

Mother's first job was in the old "garment factory" that had been converted to making floor mats for Buick. She worked the 3-11 p.m. shift and sewed bindings on big heavy mats. I think it was piece-work, but I'm not sure. Later they stopped binding the floor mats and she worked on a kind of machine that backed the mats with latex. At one time her arms and hands developed an incredible crusty rash from the latex. Most of the women who worked there were a bit rougher around the edges than she, but Mother made some good friends there. Several of them were at her funeral and told us how kind and helpful she had been to them, especially in talking through family/kid problems.

I think Mom worked at the factory through most of my college years (I graduated in 1959), though there were a number of lay-off periods when she would draw unemployment. I seem to recall that the unemployment check was \$28. One year, either when she was unemployed or after the factory finally folded, she worked at the school as the cook. It was supposed to be part-time and I think she made only \$25/week. However, she didn't like to waste the government surplus, so she made all the flour into bread and made a lot of other wonderful homemade goodies, so the job was pretty much full time for her. She was very fussy about serving healthful and attractive food, which resulted in most of the bus drivers and school officials scheduling their days so that they would just happen to be near her school at lunch time. She also had lots of parents tell her that their children's eating habits improved while she was cook. On the side she counseled everyone and had children coming in

to read to her and the like. After that, she worked for a very short length of time at Gillard's grocery, which is why the police went there first when Daddy was killed.

She only had the job a Fochman's Auto Supply a short time when Daddy was killed.

She later told me that she had learned only about two days before that Lee was a widower with young children. She was a general bookkeeper/secretary and the only woman working there. It was a more pleasant job, but didn't pay particularly well. I know that the summer Peter and I lived with her (1966) she finally got a small raise and brought home a bottle of sherry to celebrate. She had earlier spent a lot of time on her own initiative hunting through the books and writing letters to people with old bills. She collected quite a lot of money that her boss had given up on, but he didn't acknowledge it in any significant way—more out of a kind of general neglect than any deliberate unwillingness to give her credit. My impression was that he simply wasn't a very "tuned in" employer. She continued to work for Fochman until about a month before she died and Lee worked there until he retired.

## 2. EASTERN STAR

Daddy joined the Masonic Lodge in Alpena when I was quite young. His brothers were Masons and encouraged him to join. They gave him a Masonic ring when he did. I think Mother joined the Eastern Star in Alpena at about the same time. They were neither of them very active in the Alpena chapters and about the time I went away to college (1957) they transferred to the Lincoln chapters which were friendlier. I think Daddy joined Eastern Star at about that time. Mother had "gone through the chairs" and became Worthy Matron in 1966. Daddy had not wanted to be Worthy Patron as he was still quite shy about formal public appearances, mostly I think because he was unsure of his English. He had already asked an elderly friend (I can't remember his name) to be Worthy Patron with Mom. You may have already heard of Mother's installation, which her irreverent kids referred to as her ordination. Someone asked Mother if we were coming, and she said we weren't very interested in such things. The word got back to Grandma Bessie that we weren't interested in Mother! so she called Kathryn who mustered the forces. We called around to see what was proper behavior in such instances, and then showed up in force in our glad rags bearing a dozen roses and an engraved gold bracelet. Then we did everything properly to an extreme—e.g., when they sang the Star Spangled Banner, we sang louder and more sincerely than anyone in the hall. Mom could hardly look at us because she was afraid she'd get the giggles. Of course, no one else knew what an irreverent bunch of bastards we were, so they all raved to Mom about how great and devoted we were. (We were devoted to her.) She began dated Lee that year and didn't invite us to her dethronement the next year. Lee and Mary Kay (step-sister) went and said they tried to uphold our tradition. Actually, by that time Mom was pretty tired of Eastern Star. Her breast surgery was in the interim, and some of the people had been less-than-understanding about her inability to meet all the Matronly obligations they thought she should undertake, especially working on fund-raising dinners that included such wonderful things as blue and green dyed stuffed eggs! (Mom could be pretty biting about such things. I didn't get my sarcasm from nowhere!)

## 3. CHRONOLOGY

Daddy died August 21, 1964. I have a hard time remembering the date, so I'm glad you've written it again. I think something in me deliberately blocks the actual dates of my parents' and grandparents' deaths.

Mom's hysterectomy came sometime between then and 1966. I honestly don't know when, because I was back in Switzerland. I also don't think it was malignant, but I could be wrong. Mother had difficulty for years with fibroids which acted like a stop valve, and then released the whole flow at once. It could be terribly embarrassing. Once it happened at Alcona High School at some event Johnny was in, and another time in the church kitchen. You'll have to ask your Mom more details. I do know that when Mother got out of the hospital, she stayed with Unk and Aunt Margaret. Dr. Leonard, Mother's surgeon, called them when he was anxious about letting Mother's breast cancer go even through the weekend. She had gone to see him with a terrible pain in her breast on a Friday afternoon and had successfully convinced him that it was probably an infection and they should try antibiotics. After she left and he really thought about it, he began looking for her to get her back.

As I mentioned before, Mom met Lee at Fochman's. Larry Brassieur, who had gotten Mom the job, also worked there. Lee was at Johnny and Carol's wedding and spent enough time with Mom that Uncle Art got all concerned and lectured her about the dangers (economic) of getting involved with a man with children. They actually didn't start dating until just before Christmas 1966. Meanwhile, both sets of children had figured out their parents were interested in one another in the same way that parents figure out their children's interests--by noting the number of times the other person's name comes up. Kathryn and I had already discussed how to push things along, and Mary Kay had actually talked with her Dad and decided they could invite people from work in for a holiday drink. (The big worry on Lee's part was striking up a romance with someone at work for fear it wouldn't work out.) Then Fochman did the only imaginative thing he had ever done in his history as an employer. At his wife's urging, they hoked up a company holiday dinner at the Mt. Maria lodge, all for the purpose of throwing Mom and Lee together in a social situation. Mother then decided to invite everyone to her house for cocktails first. Lee later said that the minute he walked through the door and saw the house all decked out in its holiday best, he knew that she was for him. Mom later showed Peter and me the recipe she used for the punch and we always claimed it wasn't love but tipsiness that did it. Mom, in her wonderful innocent way about booze, had made a punch that would have put a sailor under the table. Anyway, that was the beginning.

When we got home for Christmas, Mom was pretty giddy and could hardly wait to tell me about the new man in her life. I confess that I didn't quite know how to react. I was delighted that she had found someone worthy of her after all the old farts who'd been hanging around, but I didn't know how to handle this new girlish Mom. Our friends the Hyakawa's came for New Year's Eve and all of us but Peter, who had a gig, went to the Northwoods to celebrate. Lee brought Mom a bottle of champagne which fell out of its tissue wrapping on her foot when he was giving it to her. They were in the garage at the time and he told her that even if he got a little drunk, anything he said to her that night, he meant. She promptly reported this to me! Talk about role reversals! By the time the evening was over, we all loved Lee and continued to do so until he died.

Later that winter, they called to say they were coming to visit Peter and me on a Friday night and your family on Saturday. Sonny and family had already gone North to get acquainted and welcome Lee into the family. We were still in our Cross Street apartment, so we borrowed a roll-away from a neighbor and put Lee on that in the living room and Mom on the couch. Actually, we supplied two pieces of sleeping equipment and left it to them to decide how to arrange themselves. When they got to your place, Kathryn put Mom at one end of the house and Lee at the other. Mom said she later told Lee, "I think you've just experienced the difference between my two

daughters!" Actually, they didn't sleep together until after they were married, despite my advise that their children wouldn't care and it was none of our business anyway. Mom said she just couldn't "sneak around again." I always wished they had, because maybe Lee would have insisted that Mom have those breast lumps checked earlier--ah well, who knows?

Lee called during final exam week (last week in April) to say that Mom had a mastectomy. Peter frantically graded his share of an exam he and his mentor had given that day and we left fairly late in the evening for up North. Meantime I called Johnny and said "It's Mom." I don't remember that, but Carol says he nearly fainted. I can't remember where we stayed when we went up North. I do remember that we went to see Mom in the hospital and she told us that the results had just come back from pathology and the cancer was in the lymph nodes. I was absolutely numb and when we went to leave, a mother of one of my high school friends was checking us out and said "do you know this person?" pointing to the woman standing next to us. I looked kind of blank and so she told me the woman's name and I still drew a blank. It was someone I had gone to school with. Peter said something on the way out about how bad I must feel about not recognizing the woman and I didn't comprehend for a long time what he was talking about. Mom told us she had given Lee the opportunity to get out of their proposed marriage, and he said, "So what am I going to tell people?--that I don't want to marry you because you've got only one?"

I went up North to be with Mom for awhile when she got out of the hospital. She was determined not to feel sorry for herself and started immediately finding things to wear that would look OK. Kathryn was there, too, I think and bought her a green print duster sort of dress.

Kathryn and I went North again a week before Lee and Mom's wedding to help get ready. There's another funny story attached to that. All summer Lloyd and Peter had been telling us all the decadent things they were going to do together while we were in Spruce. They talked endlessly of girlie-joints and bars and general misbehavior. Then, the day Peter was to deliver me and the kids to your house, he came home to report that Detroit was burning. The Detroit riots had broken out and a dusk curfew had been imposed in the Detroit area and all liquor outlets had been closed. We threw our stuff in suitcases and tore for Livonia, arriving there just as dusk was falling. Your Dad came bursting out of the house saying, "Did you bring any beer?" Of course we hadn't and he was out, so we had a dry evening. Kathryn and I a lot of fun letting Lloyd and Peter know that they were going to have to live a restrained life after all. We took all you kids and went North. Peter and Lloyd came up the next Friday night and arrived very late. Mother figured it out right away, but Kathryn and I only learned later that they started hunting for open bars, found the first somewhere North of Bay City, but hit every one from then on up! (Incidentally, I was in Spruce the crucial weeks two months in a row, so Danny's birth was in June instead of April as originally planned.)

I'm sure you remember the wedding pretty well. Mom and Lee had originally planned to slip off and get married, but the family would hear none of it. In fact, I think you and all your cousins once again began making plans to go trailing down the aisle (after I failed you). They finally agreed to have "just the immediate family," at which time all of Daddy's family and Lee's wife's family began making plans to attend, which they did. The immediate family was about 80 people. We had a great time. The wedding cake was mostly so you little ones wouldn't be disappointed that it wasn't like a "real" wedding. Mary Kay Smith danced on the table which did not go down well with Smitty, her husband at the time. We sang a lot. Kathryn let you guys make

piles of Kleenex flowers to put on the cars. She said, "Mom will just have to put up with them." Kathryn and I had spent hours in Alpena before we found a lovely white nightie which would cover Mom's scar. She had always worn kind of low-cut stuff, so a lot of her clothes had to go.

The second mastectomy came the following spring, in about May. I'm not sure exactly when, but I know I was too pregnant and the doctor wouldn't let me go North. That time, Mom found a lump under her arm while they were all painting the dining room. Danny was born June 4 (Lee's birthday and about four hours before Robert Kennedy was shot), and Mom and Lee came to see us in the hospital on the way from Bill Carley's graduation open house. After that there were some little operations to remove recurring tumors. She had one done at the Doctor's office while I was visiting her in September, but she didn't tell me at the time. She tried from time to time to talk to us about what was happening, but we were so frightened and so denying we weren't very receptive. I feel a little bad about that, but I think she understood. People weren't as well equipped to discuss dying then as they are now.

#### 4. WINTER OF 1969

"Turmoil" hardly begins to describe it. I talked to Aunt Helen a little today, trying to pin down some details, but it's pretty much a blur for all of us. Here's the best I can do. It was the season that Asian flu was so terrible. Your Dad got it and was home throwing up and pooping for several days in the late fall, I think. Mom was in and out of the hospital with "pneumonia" and would write a nice little note informing me, which I don't think ever correctly sank in. We discovered a lump on Annette's neck around the 20th of December, when some friends came to dinner and the nurse wife noticed it. Because of the flu, they didn't want anyone coming into the clinic who wasn't running a temperature, so it took us quite awhile to convince the pediatric clinic that we needed to see someone. The doctor still said it was probably swollen glands, but told us not to go North for Christmas. Mom sounded so utterly disappointed that we went anyway. Mom was weak, but back working. I essentially got Christmas ready and did both Mom's and Lee's shopping for them. Mom was really having a terrible time, was on morphine, and hardly able to eat, but I continued to deny that she wasn't going to recover. Annette developed a second lump. Mom, Lee, and the girls slid all the way to Livonia on icy roads to make the Christmas party. Mom was exhausted and spent most of the time on the couch. Your Mother knew what was happening, but I was still in denial I think, and also by that time terribly worried about Annette.

Sometime in October, I think, Kathryn had learned she had to have a hysterectomy, but she postponed it because of Mom, though I didn't realize that at the time it was because of Mom.

We spent most of January trying to find out what was wrong with Annette, with group consultations being called and all sorts of testing. Finally, the doctors decided that they didn't know what the lumps were and would have to treat them as tumors. By that time, Mom was back in the hospital and it was very clear what was happening. The UM hospital staff all knew and were absolutely wonderful to Peter and me.

Grandma Piper died on January 21. She had been in the hospital about 2 weeks Aunt Helen thinks. I didn't know that until after she died. (There is a lot to tell about Grandma's final years, but that will have to wait for another day.) Kathryn and I took you children and went North for the funeral which was on a Thursday. We were both basket cases. I wore one of Mom's hats, because I didn't have one and

couldn't even think how to get one. I went on the morning of the funeral with Mother's cousins Norman and Irene Rasmussen to see Mom in the hospital and when they left the room for a minute, Mom told me that I was the strong one, so she was going to tell me what to do with her things. I completely came apart. (It's a good thing I'm typing this or you'd be getting tear-stained paper at this very minute.) She later told Nellie Mae how badly she felt about that, and how surprised she was that I had reacted so. (Incidentally, I've never thought I was particularly strong, so that was a shock, also.) Adding to my misery, was that I didn't think I could tell Mom about how anxious I was over Annette whom I was convinced I would not get to raise. One day she (Annette) stood watching me cry on the phone to your Mother and smiled that beautiful smile of hers and said, "You're worried about Grandma aren't you Mommy?" I remember holding her and just sobbing. We went right to Grandma's funeral from the hospital, and I've never felt so exposed in my life. I loved my Grandmother dearly, but her funeral felt like a dress rehearsal for my Mother's and I don't think any of us were able to properly mourn her loss. Of course the entire community was upset about Mother, so there was no way we couldn't feel that everyone was watching us.

Grandma's funeral was on a Saturday and Annette went into the hospital on a Monday. We took Danny to you guys. Kathryn had put up the crib, but Sonja nonetheless got ready for bed, picked up the baby, and said "Night everybody" and headed for her room. Kathryn sort of sputtered "What are you doing?" and Sonja said, "I thought Danny would sleep with me." It was cute, but Kathryn prevailed. Annette's surgery was on a Wednesday. We were so out of it, we forgot to call Kathryn and she was on her second glass of wine by the time we did. When we called Lee, he was pretty flat and said Mom was "sleeping" most of the time.

Kathryn called on Friday to say she thought we should go back North. She and I went alone with Danny, who by that time had us blended into one Mom. He would hear one of us say something, look puzzled and hold out his arms. Then the other would say something and he'd switch back. By the time we arrived at Lee's, there were a lot of cars there and we knew Mom was gone. That was on February 1. Aunt Helen had been with her and Johnny. I think Uncle Elmer and Aunt Maysie, and to be honest, I don't know who else. I have no idea when Sonny and Nancy came into the picture, for instance. Bernie had been up the weekend before and had told Mom she would come up that weekend. She drove into her Mother's yard (Aunt Lena) and saw her furiously kneading bread and knew Mom was gone.

When we had hauled ourselves together, we had to go to the funeral home to "make arrangements" We were all exhausted, but the funeral director didn't seem to care. After we finally found a coffin that wasn't too ostentatious, he made us come down to his office to talk about Mom's obituary. Lee said that Mary, who worked for the *Ann Arbor News*, wanted to write it. The funeral director insisted that he had to take the information anyway and we finally gave in because it was easier than arguing with him. He slowly went through a long list of stock questions. When he finally got to the end, somebody (Sonny, I think) said, "We want it to request no flowers." The funeral director said, "I can't do that." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Because the florists would be angry with me." I said, "I don't care what the florists think of you." The whole family glared at me that "shut up" glare. As we were walking out, the funeral director said to Lee, "We haven't discussed the vault." Lee said, "Can't we discuss that later?" (Mom was to be put in one of those temporary holding places until spring.) The funeral director said, "No, we have to get everything figured in one package." Lee said, "What are the choices?" The funeral director said, "Well one costs \$150 and the other \$200." Lee said in the most exhausted tone, "Then just

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give us the \$200 one." (I'm getting mad all over again while writing this. That's why I want all my parts given away and the rest of me cremated. No sleaze bucket is going to pull that on *my* family.)

The other thing the funeral director did that I've never forgiven him for was to rearrange the way the family was to be seated. Johnny had made out the list so that each of you girls would be with an adult. The funeral director took it on himself to rearrange it in a more hierarchical order, so when we got upstairs, the seven of you were seated in a pew together behind us. The minute the minister mentioned Mom's name, you all started to cry and none of us could get to you. It was terrible. All I remember from the whole service is the sobs from you kids and my inability to get my arms around you.

Even in all this misery, we had some nice times. The food flowed into Lee's house, which was a good thing because we were feeding 28 people. We had things like chicken casseroles for breakfast, which seemed fitting, because Mom always thought breakfast should be imaginative if possible. (She didn't like breakfast food.) One evening a whole lot of Stevie's and Lee Ann's friends showed up, all dressed up, with a card. They had been at the funeral home and were sent over to the house by Sonny. Stevie came out to see if they could cut a cake and they had a nice little tea party. One night we came home from the funeral home to find Debbie walking the floor with Danny, who was howling. He'd been wonderful up to that time, but he'd "had it" with being raised by whoever was handy. On top of that, they couldn't find his pacifier and all the stores were closed (don't ask me why we had only one). I stuffed some cotton in a nipple and we got him to sleep with that. Mary Kay took the girls to her house for the night. Later we got a phone call with all the girls laughing hysterically. When Debbie took off her dress, the pacifier fell out. Nancy shocked Debbie out of her shoes the next day by saying, "Why Debbie, I didn't know you had three." Lee's brother Louie came immediately and slept with Lee. That has always struck me as such a pure brotherly thing to do. There was a big, wonderful dinner at the Lutheran Parish House, because the "overflow" from Mom's funeral was in the church basement. Karen Benghauser and her husband came up from Detroit for the funeral and a week later showed up at our apartment in Ann Arbor with presents for Annette. We also had a somewhat delightful time telling the poor Eastern Star people that they couldn't do an Eastern Star service because there would be too many non-Eastern Star visitors. They were quite upset and managed to bring their deprivation up a number of times, reminding us that a Worthy Matron had passed on. In retrospect, it wasn't very nice of us, but at the time we needed to rebel a little at something.

Peter arranged for all of our friends to be with Annette in isolation while he came up for the funeral. You may recall that the lumps were tubercular lymph nodes. We couldn't send Danny back with Kathryn because Michael was again running a low grade temperature. That was the year he had all the blood tests trying to find out what was wrong with him because of the recurring temperature, which was also scary. It later turned out to be an infection in the root of a baby tooth. We got Annette home on the Tuesday or Wednesday after we got back.

As soon as we had all recovered, your Mom went in for her surgery. We got Michael for the duration. He got Asian Flu and was a really sick little boy. I wound up at the emergency room with him late at night with all the underpants and towels I could find along with me because he was going at both ends and weak as a kitten.. Every time the doctor would start into our examining room, someone would come for him because children were coming in convulsing. Sometime about 1 a.m., I was just

overcome and put my head on the gurney and just sobbed. After the doctor saw us, I had to carry Michael a long way to the pharmacy to get a prescription. He was so heavy and had his little arms wound tightly around my neck and kept saying, "Don't lose me, Aunt Honey." I felt so terrible. I knew it was irrational, but I somehow kept feeling I had blown it by letting my sister's child get sick while I had him. I don't think any of us were too rational during that time.

Sometime along in there also, Johnny Olson got pneumonia and was in the hospital. When it was finally all over, we all started to fold up. Kathryn called one day to ask if I found myself crying at strange times, like when we were scrubbing floors (of course, I think scrubbing is worth crying or at least whining about anyway). Sonny and Johnny both developed high blood pressure and have been on medication ever since. Johnny was still teaching in Flint, where race riots and weapons sweeps were becoming common events in the classroom. He took to passing out. I decided it was work or a shrink. I phoned my old school and fortunately for me, they had a classroom emergency and were delighted to hear I was available. I was able to ride in on my white horse to rescue the situation and rescued my own sanity in the process, though it was years before I was able to go to church in Spruce.

I'm afraid you got a lot more than you bargained for in this letter. I think, however, it needed to be written. I'll send a copy to Annette also. There's lots more to be said about Mom, which I'll save for another day. I also learned more about how Grandma got to Aunt Helen when I talked to her today.

Love,

*Aunt  
Honey*