

# FAMILY FUN WITH AUNTS, UNCLES AND COUSINS

by  
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Grandfather Charles in the introduction to "Volume 1" of *The Parlins*, explains that the inception of these family volumes came about because an American novelist of his generation had painted a sordid picture of midwestern family life at the turn of the 19th century. Grandmother Daisy Parlin had known the women described in the novel, *The Grandmothers*, and the author's sordid interpretation of the facts as she knew them, infuriated her.

I am now three generations removed from the era of *The Grandmothers*, almost seventy-five years later in American history. In 1970 we hear much in the secular press and from sociological studies to indicate that the family as we have traditionally known it, is becoming obsolete. There are sobering statistics to support such a prediction. Divorce rates soar to new all-time highs. Children from divided homes and reshuffled marriages have created psychological crises not unfamiliar to any school in America today. The radical shift in sexual morality which permits previously unthought of freedom in premarital sex, many girls and boys choosing to live together without getting married etc. are creating new life-styles for a sizeable segment of America's population. But I feel just as strongly as did Grandmother Daisy in 1933, that this isn't going to be the last word. In thousands of families such as ours, the joys of family life have been so great, that our children will not be content to spend their adult life without the joys of family relationships.

My memories of happy times with aunts, uncles and cousins go back as far as I can remember. Aunt Dorothy and Uncle George Parlin and Aunt Ruth and Uncle Howard Sanborn lived in Glen Ridge, N.J., across a commonly shared driveway on Hillside Avenue. There was never a single instance when the announcement was made that we would go to Glen Ridge when we were not overjoyed with delight. On many occasions I can remember being put to bed in Tenafly and waking up in a bed in Glen Ridge at Aunt Dorothy's house. I never asked what

had happened. I just accepted this as absolutely normal routine to be staying in Glen Ridge for a few days. One year when Aunt Dorothy was very ill, Uncle Stew and his brother Ed came to live with us in Tenafly. We thought nothing strange about this at all.

Before Grandma and Grandpa made the decision to buy land at Silver Bay and establish Silver Bay as summer headquarters for our branch of the family, several weeks of every summer were spent in a big, rented house at Bay Head on the New Jersey seashore. Grandfather Charles and Grandmother Daisy were there; Aunt Ruth and Uncle Howard and their two oldest sons; Aunt Dorothy and Uncle George and their two sons; Grandma and Grandpa; Uncle Charlie and me—we were all there. The women shared the cooking and evidently all got on together under one roof with a minimum of frustration and much good fun. So we “cousins” as I shall call us for the remainder of this chapter, were used to being together and we were fond of those summers at Bay Head. I have been told we cousins all had measles together there one summer. On another summer when I was two, Aunt Ruth decided to organize a “Tom Thumb Wedding” to celebrate Grandfather Charles’ and Grandmother Daisy’s wedding anniversary. Aunt Ruth and Grandmother Daisy made all the costumes. I was the only girl so naturally I was the bride. Uncles Charlie, Stew, Howie and Ed wore little black suits as groom and ushers respectively. Uncle John, to his everlasting chagrin, at age one, was the flower girl. I do not remember this but there are family pictures around which were taken on this occasion. Exactly twenty years later in 1952, I was married to Dad. Grandma got out the old photograph of the Tom Thumb Wedding and had a professional photographer in New York make a full-sized portrait of me as Tom Thumb’s bride in 1932 to match my wedding portrait of 1952. These hung side by side in her bedroom in Englewood.

Before Grandpa built his Silver Bay house, he and Grandma would rent a cottage in Shewanapek Bay. Often the aunts, uncles and cousins would visit us there. One summer Aunt Ruth, who was the great family organizer, decided with Uncle Howard to take the cousins on a Lake George boat ride on the “Mohican.” In those days the steamer docked at the Silver Bay dock, now the “ERC.” Grandpa drove all of us down to the Silver Bay dock. As the boat pulled in to pick us up, Grandpa presented Aunt Ruth with a huge bouquet and unfurled a huge “Just

Married" sign. Amidst great laughter, Aunt Ruth and Uncle Howard boarded the steamer with six little kids in tow with Grandpa waving "Just Married" to send us all off.

One of my fondest memories of the Clan gatherings is that of the family Christmas Party in Tenafly. Grandma always prepared a magnificent buffet supper for about fifty people. Friends and relatives were invited. I can remember the huge round ten-pound Stilton cheese that Grandpa always brought from the Washington Square Market for the occasion. It sat on the buffet table with a spoon in it. (After the party Grandpa would cut the great round cheese into cartwheel slices and give sections away.) The highlight of the Christmas Party was the caroling with the family orchestra.

The family orchestra had actually given several formal concerts. Aunt Grace and Aunt Dorothy played piano; Aunt Ruth played violin; Uncle Howard, violin; Uncle George, cello; Grandma, flute; and Grandpa, bass viol. By the time the cousins came along the orchestra only gathered for the Christmas Party. I don't ever think that caroling has sounded as glorious as it did for those marvelous Christmas Parties.

We used to share Christmas Dinners together. Either the Glen Ridge crowd would come to us or we would go to them. One of my greatest early Christmas disappointments was the year we had a blizzard. I remember Grandpa put us in the car to drive to Glen Ridge. We drove as far as the Englewood Hospital when Grandpa decided to turn around and go home. It just didn't seem like Christmas without going to the relatives.

Family dinner parties were not limited to Christmastime. We would often drive to Glen Ridge for family parties. I think the parties that impressed me the most were those at Aunt Dorothy's house. Aunt Dorothy always prepared and served those beautiful dinners herself. The beautifully set table, the marvelous food, the ease and grace with which she did everything impressed me enormously. Later, in my own home, I was to remember Aunt Dorothy's wonderful family dinners and I tried to copy her style of entertaining.

After Grandpa built his Silver Bay house the relatives would always come to spend a week or so with us there. Grandfather Charles and

Grandmother Daisy were there for the summers, as Uncle Charlie has explained in his chapter. Those weeks with the relatives were joyful.

I remember one rather idiotic custom. In those days Walt Disney had just become successful with Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. The year he produced "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" as a movie, one of the dairies produced a series of "Snow White" glasses filled with cottage cheese. None of us liked cottage cheese particularly, but we ate it by the glass full in order to get a complete set of glasses. There were eight cousins and eight glasses. Grandma set up a special children's table for the cousins. We developed this stupid game of dashing to the table. The cousin who was stuck with the "Snow White" glass was the rotten egg for that meal. We really nearly killed ourselves and each other to avoid getting that "Snow White" glass.

It was because of this great annual gathering of cousins that Grandpa invented his swimming rules. It stands as testimony to the skillful psychology of these rules that all of us cousins, now married and bringing our own children to Silver Bay, still follow these rules with our children. The principle Grandpa wanted to establish was that instead of telling kids what they couldn't do (which is never terribly successful) he would establish a series of accomplishments and rewards which would give incentives to children to perfect their swimming skills and therefore establish as soon as possible safety and competence at the waterfront. The rules were basically as follows:

1. first five strokes—ice cream cone.
2. first fifteen strokes—ice cream cone.
3. swim from dock to rock—ice cream cone.
4. swim from raft to shore—ice cream cone. Privilege of rowing alone between raft and shore.
5. swim from Skippers Island to shore. Privilege of rowing alone between Skippers, Pudding Island and boat house.
6. swim around islands. Jack knife and carve initials in canoe dock. Privilege of rowing alone between Skippers, Rowan's Point and Arms' Point.
7. swim across lake. \$1.00 and privilege of the lake.

Ed and I were the only ones of the cousins as teen-agers to swim across the lake and back. For that we got only a pat on the head. Everyone

thought we were crazy. I only did it because Ed had done it. In those days I tried to keep up with everything Ed did. I think he enjoyed working me to death.

Over the years the only aspect of the swimming rules to change have been the rewards. The ice cream cones, surprisingly, are still eagerly sought by the young fry. The canoe dock is now cement so no one carves initials any more. Families have divided on rewards for swimming the islands and swimming the lake, but the privileges remain the same.

A favorite Smith family anecdote is associated with Grandpa's famous swimming rules. Every summer we take all the children to Glens Falls to visit Dr. Mintz, Aunt Joan's father, for our annual eye check-up. One very hot summer day, when Nathan was about four years old, we were returning to Silver Bay from the eye check-up. Dad stopped at a traffic light. There was a very stout lady standing on the corner eating an ice cream cone. Nathan leaned way out of the car window and shouted to the lady, "How far did you swim?"

There is one extremely significant part of family summers together at Silver Bay that affected me personally. Uncle Charlie has written about his recollection of Grandfather Charles and Grandmother Daisy Parlin. I must mention with great love, affection, and gratitude my relationship to Grandmother Daisy. She loved to sew, knit and crochet. Now it so happened that my own mother did not like hand work of any kind. It was Grandmother Daisy Parlin who lovingly and patiently taught me how to embroider, knit, and crochet, hand work I love to do to this day. It astounds me even now when I think of it that she could get a tom-boy like me at the age of six and seven to sit down and do this hand work by the hour. But I loved it and I loved her. I can remember the many, many afternoons during the war with Grandmother Daisy, Aunt Ruth and Aunt Dorothy and me sitting and embroidering baby clothes and knitting and crocheting for the war relief victims of World War II. It is to my grandmother that I owe my introduction to handwork which has played such an important part in my life and in the life of my own children ever since.

Grandmother Daisy had crocheted an afghan for each of her own children and each of their spouses. As each of the grandchildren came

along, she crocheted an afghan for them. In the summer of 1942, she was crocheting the afghan for me. I had picked out the pattern myself. Grandmother Daisy died in November of that year. She had not finished my afghan. You can imagine how overwhelmed with love I was when at Christmas time I opened a large package and found therein my afghan. Aunt Ruth had finished it for me. I took that afghan to college with me and it was on my bed for all four of my years at Albion College.

Another thing Aunt Ruth and Grandmother Daisy taught me was how to cook Penuche fudge and pull taffy. I still think penuche fudge is one of my favorite candies and my own children think pulling taffy to Cousin Helen Davis' recipe is the height of good fun. How well I remember Aunt Ruth's "candy parties" on the porch of the cabin. She and Grandmother Daisy and on one memorable occasion Cousin Helen herself from Mississippi, would stew up penuche and taffy in the small cabin kitchen. Then all the cousins would gather on the porch to sample penuche and to smear our hands with butter and burn our finger tips trying to pull taffy that was still too hot to handle on the large, buttered platters. And then pull and pull and pull. And the fun we had one year giving our large Labrador Retriever "Star" a piece of taffy and having her get her paws all stuck up and her jaws glued together with the unfamiliar substance. But she loved it and licked every gooey string on her paws until it was all gone.

One of the more memorable fun-affairs with the relatives involved Aunt Ruth's 50th birthday. For this marvelous occasion Aunt Ruth and Uncle Howard were at Silver Bay. Now utterly unlike Aunt Ruth, who had always thought that any excuse for a party was a good excuse, she had told *everyone* for weeks prior to the famous day that she did not want *anyone* to even acknowledge her birthday. As far as she was concerned, when one reached the ancient age of fifty, one was definitely over the hill. If she was getting old she didn't want anyone to broadcast the fact. Absolutely there was to be NO CELEBRATION.

Had this involved anyone but Aunt Ruth, I think we might have honoured her wishes. But not with Aunt Ruth. Uncle Charlie, Aunt Joan, Dad and I decided to really do the thing up in grand style. We hung curtains over the door so that no one could see what we were up

to. We got miles of black crepe paper and hung streamers all over the porch. We went to the undertakers in Ti and got "sympathy" cards with which to make place cards which we stuck into black gum drops. We wrote with black crayons on the napkins, "Prepare to meet Thy God," "It's later than you think," "Jesus saves," and all the other gruesome sayings we had ever seen written on the rocks of Tongue Mountain by our fundamentalist brethren. The centerpiece was pine boughs and lilies.

As per custom, juice was served on the porch on the other side of the house before dinner. We made black arm bands for everyone and came out with the juice glasses. As we served the juice, all of us were crying and wailing loudly. This was the first clue to anyone that we were up to no good. Grandpa had been let in on the secret, and he invited Aunt Ruth and the rest to come to dinner in the scariest voice you can imagine. He broke down several times and had to get out his handkerchief to wipe his eyes and blow his nose. When Aunt Ruth saw the black crepe paper, the lilies and the sympathy cards, she collapsed into laughter. She was still laughing when dessert-time came, and we carried in the huge birthday cake with "50" written in foot-high letters on it while Dad played "Happy Birthday to You" in the minor key. That really has to go down as one of the most successful birthday parties of all times! And far from being angry with us, Aunt Ruth evidently told all her friends for months and months afterwards about her "50th Birthday Party" never leaving out one detail of all the black and sordid motif of the festivities. Far from being a melancholy birthday, it was one of the funniest.

It is hard to overestimate how large a part the aunts, uncles and cousins played in my life as I grew up. When I neared my seventeenth birthday, Uncle Wilbur, wife of Aunt Grace, Grandpa's younger sister, lent me his car for a week. Every afternoon after school I drove Uncle Wilbur's car around and around the house at 123 Hillside Avenue in Englewood. I backed, turned, and parked etc. until I had thoroughly mastered driving. It was no surprise whatsoever that the first place to which I drove with my new license was to Glen Ridge to visit the relatives there.

When Uncle Stew and Aunt Mickey were married, they asked Uncle Howard to play the violin and Aunt Ruth to sing at their wedding. I thought this so beautiful that I asked them to play and sing at Dad's and my wedding also. Dad and I were married on December 20th, a beautiful Christmas wedding. The Christmas music they played and sang at the church was utterly beautiful. At the reception at 123 Hillside Aunt Dorothy played and Aunt Ruth led us in carol singing. How grateful I was to the beautiful dimension they added to our Christmas wedding.

When Aunt Grace died, Uncle Wilbur very carefully and lovingly gave away all the things that had meant so much to him and Aunt Grace in their life time (Grandpa has explained about Aunt Grace's and Uncle Wilbur's deaths in the introduction to "Volume III.") Uncle Wilbur was very fond of Dad. Knowing of his great love of music and singing, Uncle Wilbur gave Dad and me Aunt Grace's concert grand Steinway piano as a wedding present. We have cherished this all our married life.

Another piece of furniture in our Delhi Home comes from the relatives. The first winter we lived in Delhi our dining room was empty. That spring Aunt Dorothy and Uncle George broke up their home in Glen Ridge and moved to Meadow Lakes. They offered to send us their dining room furniture which had originally belonged to Grandma's mother and father in Germantown, Pennsylvania. So the old Boyd family dining room furniture has come to Delhi via the relatives in Glen Ridge.

As I was growing up I continued to visit the Glen Ridge relatives on every occasion possible. I never drove through Montclair without going to see them, and it was always a joy, when Dad and I were early marrieds, when they would drop in to see us in Hasbrouck Heights and later in Towaco. One of the most memorable visits of recent years was our 1970 visit to the relatives at Meadow Lakes, where both Aunt Dorothy and Uncle George and Aunt Ruth and Uncle Howard had retired. We were absolutely thrilled to hear the evening concert there where Aunt Ruth accompanied Uncle Howard and another Meadow Lakes resident in a violin-duet, and where Aunt Dorothy played with three other ladies in succession two-piano selections. And later in their



apartment, Uncle George showed us that he has still kept up his banjo, and he thrilled us with his playing and singing. So this was quite a memorable visit for us.

It is astounding to realize that of the seven cousins, four met and married girls they met while working as emps at Silver Bay—Uncles Blackie, Howie, John, and Donny. Stew brought his bride, Mickey, to work at Silver Bay for the first two summers they were married. (I was the only cousin of my generation who never worked as an emp at Silver Bay. That era in the life of the cousins must be written by one of the others.) All now spend at least part of their summers at Silver Bay, so the commaraderie and fun continue.

It is fun to see what joy the second cousins are having together. The “rag tag” games at the raft continued summer after summer; the hikes up Black Mountain and Mt. Washington and the concerts in Saratoga also became the focus for cousin activity.

Family fun continued for the Charles Parlins in the fall and winter. As I write this chapter we have just come to the end of another glorious family Christmas at Silver Bay. For several years, now, we have had Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners in the living room of the Smith Silver Bay house with Grandma and Grandpa, Uncle Charlie’s and Uncle Blackie’s families and Max and Maria Mintz. Perhaps you children will look back on these Thanksgiving and Christmas festivals at Silver Bay as symbolizing for you the deep joy in family relationships that the Tenafly Christmas parties with the family orchestra symbolized for me when I was a child.

The whole tribe continues to look forward to the summers and the informal gatherings of the cousins and second cousins at the dock, at Aunt Ruth’s four o’clock ritual at the tea house, at the Fourth of July picnics in front of Blackie’s garage (and who will do the six dozen deviled eggs *this year?*!), and more and more frequently to the weddings and baptisms as the family grows and the fun increases.