

FRANCIS J. SHIELDS
23 ASHLEY DRIVE
BALLSTON LAKE NY 12019
Tel. (518) 877-5796

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1

January ¹⁰/₈, 1994

Dear Felicity and Jack,

I was reminded earlier today of Fel's comment in her initial note (11/10/93) replying to my Nov. 1 letter of inquiry to her brother Chet. Fel had written at one point "...but how can you stand those winters?" At the time of remembrance today I was busy operating my snowblower against the roughly one foot of snow that covered our driveway this morning when I got up. I don't have any answer to give to her question - at least not one that makes any sense to our "snowbird" friends - except that my wife, Anna, and I have not (yet) felt the urge to flee our winters. We both enjoy the change of seasons here in this familiar (over 35 years for me and 30 years for Anna) part of NY state, and when we think of possibly moving it's not to the far south but to the Atlantic coast of New England. Maine, close along the coast, is my first pick for various reasons, but Anna would want to think carefully about other possibilities, such as the Mass. or lower N.E. coasts. But we haven't come to the point of decision yet, and probably won't be rushed, as we are both are enjoying relatively good health (Deo gratias !) and feel up to the lawn-mowing and snow-shoveling and -blowing chores of the seasons here.

In this letter I'll comment first on Fel's note of Nov. 10 and then go on to a short (I hope) narration of what's happened to me and mine in the years since we last saw one another in the late '40s.

Regarding Gene Dembinski, I had good touch with him for possibly 10 years after the war, and he came to my first wedding in 1953 in Lynn, MA. Sometime in the mid 50's, however, I lost contact with him. I knew he had married a woman named Gloria, and I think I actually met her before he married. My recollection (it isn't as good as it used to be) is that she was very attractive but somewhat showy and shallow. As I recall, I didn't think she was "his type." His parents left Brooklyn in the 10-year interval mentioned above, and my address for them was in Yorktown Heights, NY. My addresses for Gene changed two or three times, and the last shown in my address book was in Glen Rock, NJ, around 1967. My personal (i.e., face-to-face) contact with Gene probably was at our St. Mike's class 25th anniversary in 1966, at which he related that he and Gloria had some domestic difficulties. One such difficulty was that she had attacked him with a scissors, as he related, though he did not seem to be unduly upset by this event. Gene always was a fellow of considerable equanimity, there being little that seemed to disturb him in situations where I would have been pushing the panic button, and he narrated the scissors incident, as I recall, with a bit of humor, as if it were no big thing and had not damaged his basic relationship with Gloria. My recent interest in finding him again was generated by the revitalization of our high school alumni. St. Michael's itself closed down in 1960, but the alumni association found a home in the replacement school, Xaverian H.S. on Shore Road at 77th St., Brooklyn. I have been a member of the alumni since graduation, and attended my graduation class's 50th anniversary in 1991 at Xaverian. The alumni newsletters periodically request information about

graduates whose whereabouts are unknown, and tries to keep its list of those who have died up to date. Thus my renewed interest in trying to find out what happened to my old friend Gene. Though you have not been able to add to what I know, Fel, I have one more trail to trace Gene on; there is a male Dembinski (first name not Gene) listed in the phone book for the area of NJ where I show Gene's last address. I plan to make an inquiry there when I can find the time. Perhaps it will be fruitful, as my note to Chet was! If so, I'll let you know.

Your note relates that you were married to each other in 1947 and have 5 children and 11 grandchildren; and that all (your children) are doing well "save one who has just divorced." The news of your number of children and grandchildren is just great, and I'll relate my own story below. But I wouldn't agree with the "save one..." phrase. Because we've experienced the same disappointment (two divorces among our children), I've come to realize that what our children do today reflects their upbringing in a different world of moral viewpoints, cultural attitudes, and personal commitment. I think we were better off in our world of the 50s and 60s for being able to sustain the rigorous sense of values our parents handed down to us, and we did our best to inculcate those values in our progeny. But the world around us has changed more than we hoped for in some ways, and our children have been subjected to outside forces we didn't have to contend with as we grew up. So I regret that divorce has come to our family as it has to yours, but I've managed to admit that in many ways it's better than the constant domestic warfare that often prevails when divorce is not accepted as a solution. And of course the church has altered its approach to the annulment process, so that various impediments to the marriage contract are more carefully identified, analyzed, and weighed than was true when we were newlyweds. Also, divorced persons can feel welcome today in Catholic church parish life. So I've managed to live with the marriage failures of our children, and their alienation - most of them - from the church, though I do not condone either. I keep them in my prayers instead.

January 9, 1994

According to your note, Fel, you and Jack are "both in comparatively good health and enjoying whatever activities we can manage." I hope that means nothing of a serious nature restricts your mobility or your feeling of being equal to the normal demands of running and caring for a household. Obviously, at our ages we aren't quite as supple and energetic as we were fifty years ago, and our bones have gotten kind of creaky, and sensitive to strains and the weather. But *beyond that*, it's my wish that you're both vitally active (if not "swingin") seniors!

Your news of Eileen Moran was welcome. I somehow knew that she had moved to St. Louis (?), but was completely unaware of her 10 children! That news had me wondering about the number of grandchildren she has, but perhaps you can fill me in on that some other time. I was sorry to hear that her husband is deceased; after so many years of marriage it can be a rough experience. I hope she is doing well now, four years after her loss. I seem to recall that Eileen was the first of the "crew" to be married and I believe I met her husband-to-be while we were all still in contact after WWII. Perhaps I would remember his face if you should think of recalling his surname for me at some other writing.

The news of Peggy Doyle was especially meaningful to me, and saddening, too, as you indicated she died about 10 years ago. I think I last saw Peggy around 1948 or 1949, before I finished at City College and left NYC. Some years afterward my brother Joe indicated he had talked to her and she was unmarried. So for all these intervening years I've periodically wondered if Peggy had ever gotten married, as I wished she had. My breakup with Peggy was all my doing, and on reflection I think I just wasn't ready for marriage at the time. I know she was deeply affected by my action and I've carried a guilty sense over that with me

for all these years. My parents and siblings thought the world of her, and never understood why I had broken off our relationship. Over time, her name has come up in family gatherings and it's always been with a fond remembrance, and a wondering at what had eventually happened in her life. Your note has closed an unfinished chapter in my personal life, by giving me the good news that Peggy had gotten married and had had one child. I hope that hers was a happy union and that the husband and child she left were the center of her life when alive and are a continuing credit to her memory now that she's no longer here. Perhaps at another time you can tell me more about her later years after I last saw or heard from her. I have never forgotten her.

Coming down to the end of your note, Fel, I can report that my brother Joe is no longer among us. He died suddenly from an unsuspected aortic aneurysm which burst on June 7, 1991. He never changed very much from the Joe you and Jack knew. He was sociable, opinionated, full of jokes which he told with consummate skill and dialects, argumentative, devoted to family, demanding, impatient, generous, unpretentious, honest, and fussy about his food and cuisine. Those were a few of the attributes that come to mind when I try to describe him. He played out until the very end his role of always telling you what he was thinking. I understand that in the ambulance taking him to the hospital a few minutes after his attack, the female paramedic attending him tried to encourage him to hang on and keep from slipping away by telling him: "You're going to be OK, Joe; you'll make it!" His reply, so typical of him, was "Bullshit!" And he was right.

As you may know, Joe married a woman of Italian descent, Marilyn Ianuzzi, in 1949. He was a postal carrier in the Ft. Hamilton P.O. from about that time until a few years before his death, when he retired on a knee disability incurred in the line of duty. He and Marilyn had six children - five girls and a son. All but one daughter are (or were) married. He's survived by his widow, all his children, and six grandchildren. We all miss him.

Which brings me to my story (as an old friend of mine used to say, "I haven't got time to write a short letter.") I finished at City College with an engineering degree in Jan. 1949, and immediately went to work for General Electric. For a year and a half I had 3-month training assignments at various GE plants in NY and New England, then settled into a six-year project in plant facilities in GE's Lynn MA plant. It was there I met and married (in Oct. 1953) a woman of French-Canadian heritage, the youngest of 10 children, whose name was Leona Martel. She was a sociable, compassionate woman who spoke her mind, loved opera and music, was a hard worker and devoted to her family, had an uncanny intuitive sense about people, and always said her prayers in French. Leona and I became the parents of five children, 3 sons first and then 2 daughters. We had what I recall as basically a happy marriage, with the usual ups and downs. In 1956 I transferred to a consulting engineering group in the GE Schenectady plant, and that office became my workplace for the next 31 years. Three of our children were born in a Schenectady hospital; the two oldest were born in Lynn.

After almost 16 years of our marriage, Leona was taken from us by lung cancer, very quickly, in 1969. With a visiting housekeeper-cook, I managed to continue family life for us as customary, except for the absence of Leona as mother. At their mother's death, my oldest child was 14 1/2, my youngest a little over 7 years of age. Then, in 1971, about 26 months after Leona's death, I married again, this time to a widow with six children (her parents thought she was crazy). Anna is a native of Dorchester MA, Polish (Klecze) by heritage (Fel should find that has many merits), as her parents were both immigrants. She comes from a family of seven children, is easy-going, attractive, very sociable, and someone who manages to get along with just about everyone, strangers as well as friends. She loves gardening and mowing the lawn, but doesn't care that I've

taken over the cooking (gourmet style!) She was earlier married for about 12 years to an engineer who brought his family to the Schenectady area, from Dorchester and (temporarily) Mobile AL, as a new employee of GE and suffered a fatal heart attack while she was pregnant with their sixth child. Anna was a widow of eight years standing when we got married.

As you may imagine, running a household of 11 children, six of whom had been fatherless for eight years, was not exactly easy. We almost failed, but we persevered through thick and thin, including a year and a half of separation. I'm pleased to say now, after almost 23 years, that we welded together a great combination of 11 children, all long since gone from the nest, all but one of whom now recognize the creditable parenting job we've done and who get along well with one another. We have one Jim, two Marys, two Joes, one Bill, and one each of Jeanne, Anne, Jay, Leo, and Dorothy. Bill and one Joe live in Montana, three of my stepdaughters live in the Boston area, my daughters live in NYC, two of my sons are in MA, and one stepson is in the local area. My oldest son's whereabouts are currently unknown; he's alienated himself from the rest of us by his shabby treatment of his ex-wife following a bitter divorce proceeding. All told, we have at this count 15 grandchildren and (as some of our children married divorcees with children) step-grandchildren, the product of nine marriages and two divorces; two of my children have not married (yet).

I retired from GE in mid 1987, from a consulting job that took me around the world twice and sent me to Mexico, Canada, England, Germany, Libya, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Sumatra, and Kalimantan (Borneo). Since retirement I've worked with a GE colleague on authoring a book on our area of technical expertise. That's about five to six years of effort, and we've produced a lot of output. Now the outcome of the whole operation is threatened by a disagreement between us about how much detail we need to include in our work; the petty difference may actually abort the whole project. But if so, Anna and I'll get busy on fixing up our 7-bedroom house to put it up for sale and consider where we'll move next to live out what time remains to us. Meanwhile, in my spare time I'm into computers, mechanical repair and upkeep of the house and its equipment, and some volunteer work with a food pantry and a soup kitchen run by local churches.

My father passed away in 1972, but my mother survived him till she died in 1989 at (almost) age 97. My oldest sister, Dot, died last September, so I have three surviving sisters. Two (including Ronnie, who remembers you well) live in Maine, and the third lives in Maryland, near Washington.

And that just about concludes my "short" narration. Perhaps some of the above may raise some questions in your minds, but I hope it generally clarifies what's taken place in my life since last we met. If I can add anything of interest, please let me know; I'll be pleased to do it.

Be assured that if you are in this part of the north at any time we would be delighted to see you. For our part, we have been promising friends and relatives in GA and FL that we will visit sometime; we hope to keep those promises and would endeavor to get to see you if we can manage a trip to your sunshine state.

Let's stay in touch somehow, and not let nearly 50 years slip by before we have contact again!

I was hoping to be able to include a recent color photo of Anna and me with this letter, but it is being sent to us by the daughter who took it and it hasn't arrived yet.

Regards to you both, and good health.

Frank Shield