

Getting to Know ...

This issue includes a mini-bio for a new member who only had her lineages published in the last issue and has since provided her history, or the information was too late to meet the publishing deadline. We also have a story about Robert Sherwood Alford, AAFA #0509. He was the nephew of one of AAFA's founding fathers, Wick Alford.

Debra Kaye McKrill, AAFA #II7I

"What do you want to know about THAT for? I don't know anything about the Alford's."

These are the standard statements from the paternal side of my family, which include the Alford's. I was born in Lansing, Michigan, to Duane Robert McKrill and Myrna Lee Valentine (Corr) on July 15, 1955. Duane and Myrna were married in 1954. In 1956 they were divorced.

Duane's mother, my grandmother, was Bernice Irene Alford (pronounced Burn-is, she wouldn't let you forget it!). Bernice was born on Feb. 17, 1902 to Jacob Eugene Alford and Francis Josephine Wygant in Webberville, Michigan. She married Ford Avis McKrill Sept. 26, 1918. Ford and Bernice had 7 children and settled in Lansing, Michigan. Bernice was a staunch Jehovah's Witness her entire adult life. She tried to convert her family but to no avail. She gave in to my grandfather only once that we know of (Ha, Ha,) and let them have a Christmas tree! Ford and his brothers were close and they liked their beer. Bernice put a stop to that, banning the brothers from her home and children. Most of the McKrill family branches were "pruned" by Bernice in an attempt to make sure her immediate family was "protected." Bernice was a very strong woman, outspoken, opinionated and at the same time, she had a heart of gold.

When I was six, my family, which now included three more siblings and a stepfather, moved to a neighborhood about ten blocks from my grandparent's house. My stepfather's family owned a grocery/liquor store in the neighborhood. My father Duane had joined the army and went to Germany and I did not see him again until I was 13. The only connection I had with my father's family at all between the age of six and 13 was my grandmother Bernice. She kept in touch with me and

when I was old enough to ride my bike the ten blocks to her home, I saw her about once a week. I remember when I was little and before my father left for Germany, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. She always had blooming African violets and yellow canaries that she talked to and they would sing as if to answer her. She made the best mashed potatoes in the world and a special concoction that I still make of scrambled eggs, onion, green pepper, cubed ham and a can of green beans served with catsup on top! Even when I was no longer a baby, age six or seven, I remember her holding and rocking me in her rocking chair. She smelled of Cashmere bouquet soap and fresh line dried clothes. She always had a smile on her face. Sometimes she would take me to church with her.

After my grandfather died and I stayed with her, she let me sleep with her because I was afraid to be alone. It was cozy except for her loud ticking Big Ben clock! On my 18th birthday I had plans with friends to "go out" and celebrate, as the drinking age was 18 at that time in Michigan. On the way to meet my friends I made a turn and went to my grandma Bernice's house instead. It was an important time for me and I had a lot of questions about life. She was the only one I wanted to spend my 18th birthday with. I stayed late until I could see she was getting tired. She was opinionated as usual but sweet enough to tolerate an ignorant teenager until midnight!

When I married and had my children she was so proud of her great grandchildren. Pictures were displayed of all of her grandchildren and great grandchildren in her home. When she was in her 80s she sold her home and went to a retirement community. I visited her there, but now that she is gone, I realize it was not enough. She seemed to feel alone in her apartment. Knowing she loved birds I bought her a large wicker birdcage and two finches. I thought it would give her companionship. She

was thrilled to receive them and started to converse with them right away. The next day I got a frantic call from her. She was crying. One of the birds had gotten out and ran into the window and died. She told me that the other bird was mad at her and thought that she had killed his friend because he was hiding his head under his wing! She asked me to come and get the bird as she couldn't take care of it and she didn't want him to be afraid of her. I went and got the bird and spent the afternoon with her. It would be one of the last times I would spend time with her.

I was "too busy" with my three children and my husband and job. We were planning to move to Chicago. I called my grandmother a few times while living in Chicago and one time drove through Lansing but "didn't have the time" to stop to see her. "I'll stop the next time" I said to myself. There was not a next time. She died in her apartment at the age of 86. She was alone and reaching for the phone when her heart gave out. I miss her very much and since then have tried not to make the mistake of being "too busy" for someone I love.

This is the only Alford I have to tell you about but I am glad for the opportunity to share her with you! I appreciate all of the help the Alford association has given me, helping me fill in the blanks to my Alford ancestry. As for me, I live in Portland, Oregon, and have for six years. I have four children and four grandchildren. I worked for AT&T in Lansing, Michigan, for eight years and Navistar in Chicago for three years. I owned a beauty salon business in Ft Wayne, Indiana, for six years and since moving to Oregon have been an office manager to a Chiropractic clinic for five years. I also do research studies for government projects. I have been interested in genealogy since I was 15.

Since the Internet I have added hundreds to my Family Tree Maker and now have over 2000 verified ancestors. I have met hundreds of cousins via the Internet and, as with many of you, I am addicted and cannot seem to get enough of genealogy. My uncles have pictures of our Alfords and I hope to talk them into sharing some of them someday. If I succeed I will share them with you!
