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A Woman's Place

Lisa K. Speer

A WOMAN'S PLACE

By: Lisa K. Speer

I was fortunate to have both my maternal and paternal grandmothers in my life until I reached my mid-30s, so I had an opportunity to get to know them as women, as well as grandparents. Their strength continually amazed me.

My paternal grandmother, Gladys Marie Speer, was widowed in 1948 at the age of 37, and raised five children by herself, taking work in a laundry to provide for her family. Despite losing her husband prematurely, being forced into the workplace against her will to care for five children, and never having material wealth, she was the happiest person I have ever known. I never remember hearing her complain about her situation, or seeing her unhappy, with the exception of the day she lost her son, Joe. She always wore a smile and punctuated every sentence with a laugh. She read voraciously, crocheted a thousand doilies and afghans, and loved her various dogs and cats. Although she did not have a lot of money, she never forgot a birthday and every member of her family—even the ones she wasn't sure to see—had a gift waiting under the Christmas tree each year. Many of her gifts, she made herself—dolls, afghans, potholders, doilies, all created with a great deal of patience and an even greater love for her family. When I was about five, she retired and moved from Malvern to Gifford to live in a mobile home in my parents' backyard, so from then on until the time I left home, she was a constant presence in my life. Although she lived just yards away from us, she lived very independently. She visited a few minutes almost every day, but she took care of herself. She did so until her mid-90s, when her health declined so that she was unable to live by herself anymore. She moved to Little Rock and spent her last years with her daughter Wanda, and granddaughter Sarah, but I understand she often expressed the desire to go back to "her house."

My maternal grandmother, Mary Agnes Clift, had a different kind of life. Her husband, Carl Clift, lived until 1987 and he provided well for her and for their seven children, enabling my grandmother to stay home and raise their children. Being a homemaker and the primary caretaker for eight people, however, requires an enormous strength that my tiny grandmother did not appear to have ever possessed. Yet she did. I remember hearing stories from my mother about the time that my grandmother was having trouble with one of her legs, but the household chores had to be done. My grandmother propped her bad leg in a chair, which she drug around the kitchen with her, moving it from the sink to the stove, as she prepared the family's three daily meals. My maternal grandmother was the quintessential homemaker—turning out with regularity the best ever homemade chocolate pies and chicken and dumplings made from scratch without ever consulting a recipe. She even ironed her sheets and towels! As a child, she would entertain me with her funny stories of growing up, and I loved to hear her play "Under the Double Eagle" on her piano. When my grandfather died, my grandmother had never faced the situation of living alone or managing the household without him. She required assistance from her sons and daughters, their spouses and other caregivers the remaining 14 years of her life. All the love

523 East Gage Ave.
Memphis 6, Tenn.
December 5, 1959

Dear Mrs. Kratz;

Just a few words to say Howdy. I've been thinking of writing you and saying a few words. I'm not much at saying things and seems I always say the wrong things too. I've waited to a late day to apologize for my short comings as a son in law, but anyway I feel that I measure up very short on all good qualities.

Any way I wanted to tell you how much I appreciate knowing you these few years. I remember when we moved in the little house down across the branch., I was just a little boy of seven; my that has been 38 years; doesn't seem long at that. How I enjoyed coming to your house to play with Herbert. You surely must have had patience to put up with me under foot so much. You never said anything but I know I must have been in the way a lot as much as I was around.

Remember one time when Herbert and I were in swimming down on the branch behind the barn, Mr. Kratz came down in a dress and bonnet. We were almost ready to run when we realized who he was. I think Mr. Kratz was about the best man I ever knew. I know that you have missed him more than anyone knows for these years.

I have had a lot of enjoyable times through the years at your house. I remember a lot of singings; I could never carry a note: But any way I liked to come; and those Pound Suppers, were they good. I think what I really enjoyed the most were those times when I would go home with Herbert from Sunday School for Sunday Dinner. Those were really the good times of my life.

I guess it was only natural that I was to go to your house to pick me a wife, and I've enjoyed coming back to your house these 20 years that I have called myself part of the family. I have you to thank for a good wife and mother to my children, for I know that it was you who taught her the right way of life; the Christian Way. So again I wish to say Thank You for so much and ask that you not remember how I have returned so Little. So when you talk to God ask that he give me more faith, that I may grow to be a better Child of His.

It has been good knowing you, and growing up in a community where you lived. I shall always cherish the memories of being in your home, and I still like to go to your house.

Love Always;

Your Son. in law
Eugene Watson

P.S. Pauline said she would write in a few days. We all hope that you still feel like being up.

that she had poured out in raising her children was returned to her from them as they pulled together to help her cope with the loss of my grandfather and, over time, her own declining health.

Although they are both gone now and I miss them every day, I would like to believe that a little bit of my grandmothers is blended together and lives on in me. I cook with the pans, measuring cups and spoons used by my grandmother Clift, or Mam-ma, as I called her, and I'd like to believe that my cooking is a little bit better as a result. Like my Mam-ma Speer, I love to read and work puzzles and I love my dog and cats. I hope that when faced with difficulties in life, I will do so with the same kind of resilience and strength of spirit that she possessed.

The following is taken from a paper that I wrote about them and their views on women working outside the home for a women's history class at the University of Mississippi in 1991. I hope that you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed interviewing them for the paper.

In 1971, Gladys Speer retired from the City Laundry and Cleaners after twenty-three years in the workplace. After the untimely death of her husband, Clyde, in 1948, Gladys went to work in a garment factory at the age of 37 to provide for her five children, who ranged in age from eighteen to three years of age. When asked in an interview in 1990 what she thought about women working outside the home she replied, "I really think the woman's place is in the home, if she's got family."

Mary Agnes Clift spent most of her years engaged in the duties of motherhood and housekeeping. She never worked outside the home, with the exception of volunteer work in her local church, Francois Missionary Baptist, and in parent-teacher associations. Her husband, James Carl (J.C.), provided a comfortable existence for Mary Agnes and their seven children. When asked how she felt about women working outside the home she answered, "It almost takes two you know to make a living, to have things that you have to have. I think it's all right."

Gladys Speer and her daughters Wanda and Shirley and Mary Agnes Clift (l to r) at the Speer home on East Mill Street in Malvern.

The irony of these differences of opinion is striking. One would expect them to have answered differently, based on their own experiences. Perhaps this is simply a case of wanting what they did not have; or maybe it resulted from a difference in upbringing or socioeconomic conditions. A closer look at the lives and thoughts of these two women will illustrate how they came to hold such different opinions about the place of women in the home and the workplace.

Gladys Paul was born on May 21, 1906, in South Dakota, along the state line with Nebraska. At age 16, Joseph Paul, left his home in Oldenburg, Indiana, along with his younger brother, and together they settled near the town of Spencer, Nebraska. Joseph worked in a variety of occupations. He was at times a blacksmith, a carpenter, an amateur veterinarian, and occasionally found employment in sawmills. In Nebraska, he met and married Florilla Osborne. Florilla bore five children, three boys and two girls, including Gladys, her youngest child. Florilla lived to be ninety-three years old and, unlike her daughter, the circumstances of her life never required Florilla to work away from her home and children.

In 1912, when Gladys was six years old, her family moved from Spencer to Gifford, a small community in south central Arkansas. The Pauls came to Arkansas by rail and Gladys remembered the journey as "the longest train ride she ever had." She also recalls that her brother, Clint, who suffered from nightmares as a child, broke out a window on the train and was attempting to jump out when someone fortunately intervened. Gladys started school in Nebraska, but went only a short while before her family moved to Gifford. When the Paul family left Nebraska, Gladys had to say goodbye to her best friend, Laura James (Reiser). Laura and Gladys began writing one another after the Pauls settled in Gifford and continued to correspond until Laura's death in 1999.

At Gifford, Gladys finished school in 1926 as, not only the first graduate of the Gifford School, but also the only member of her senior class. Gladys admitted that she "never liked to go to school much," and she recalled very few memories of this time in her life. When asked whether or not she ever aspired to teaching, one of the few job options available to young women in the early twentieth century, Speer said that although she did receive a second grade teacher's license, she never wanted to teach.

Mary Agnes Petray was born at London, Arkansas, on March 2, 1907. Her father, William Henry Petray, was a school teacher at that time, but later went into the mercantile business. At London, he owned a two-story shop that Mary Agnes described in great detail:

> It had everything in it, anything anybody was needing. He had dry goods that was on the bolt. He had a few ladies blouses in a glassed-in compartment. He had shoes and . . . groceries and he had flour and coffee and sugar and pickles in big barrels and [in] each one of the barrels, he had a scoop . . . it was aluminum. He had coffins [upstairs] and big crocks and jars. Out at the back of the store he had plows cultivators and harrows and he had something he

called a 'gee whiz'. I don't know what that looked like.

Mary Agnes' mother, Pearl Tow Petray, later opened a millinery business on the side of William's store. Mary Agnes recalled that raising five children made her mother "kind of nervous" so her father suggested that she put in a shop of her choosing in an empty room on the side of his establishment. "She picked out a lot of just plain hats," Mary Agnes explained, "She got bolts of ribbon and little flowers . . . to decorate [the] hats . . . and she made pretty good with that."

Mary Agnes recalled many memories from her childhood, but none so clearly as the years between 1914 and 1919 when the United States was involved in World War I. She remembers certain young men in London that fought in the war, an influenza epidemic that claimed the lives of many civilians and soldiers, including her oldest sister's husband, Alonzo. She recalled the trains packed with soldiers that rolled through London after Armistice was signed, as well as the crowds of people that gathered to cheer home the returning men.

Her recollections of a particular food shortage during the war indicates that the Petrays enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle and status in their community. Flour was rationed and one morning a week, families were required to have cornbread rather than biscuits for breakfast. To make certain that people followed this regulation, the homes of London's prominent citizens were policed. The Petray home, along with that of the banker, the barber and the theater owner, were checked regularly to make sure that no extra flour was slipped home. "They checked our homes," said Mary Agnes, "to see if we had any hidden . . . but no one did. Everybody was so proud to help the soldiers anyway you could that . . . we wouldn't have done that for anything."

Gladys also remembers rationing of flour during the war. Her family, unlike the Petrays, were not bothered by the policing of their home. Gladys only recalled that many times when her family received its ration of flour, it was inedible. "Wouldn't be good at all," she remembered, "Couldn't hardly eat it."

When Mary Agnes was twelve her family moved from London to England, Arkansas. At England, her father went into the mercantile business with his brother. They named their store "Petray Brothers." After living a few years at England, the Petrays moved to Malvern, where they lived for one year before moving to Russellville. They returned to Malvern two years later. When asked why her father decided to move, Mary Agnes replied, "Daddy just took a notion to move every once and a while." The Petrays finally settled in Gifford where Mary Agnes completed high school in 1927, one year after Gladys Paul's graduation.

In school, Mary Agnes studied hard to be a teacher. She took her teacher's examination twice. The first time she lacked only a fraction of a point from passing. The following year Mary Agnes took the exam again, this time obtaining her first grade teacher's license. Several of the girls in her class took the teacher's exam, but according to her there were no boys in the class interested in becoming teachers, a profession increasingly viewed as "women's work" as men moved up into better paying and more skilled jobs in the twentieth century.

Mary Agnes never followed through with her dream of becoming a teacher. After graduation she lived with her parents until she married Carl Clift, her high

school sweetheart. In a 1990 interview, Mary Agnes remembered the first time she saw her future husband. Her family had just moved to Gifford and she was going into the eleventh grade in school. She recalled:

> I didn't know any of the pupils there and the teacher had introduced them to me. I was looking around over the room and [Carl] came in and sat down over on the far row from me and I looked over that way at him and he was just looking as straight at me and he put his hands in his desk and he just sat there and looked at me and I thought, "Well what is wrong with me? But he said right then, "I'm gonna go with that girl," and sure enough it wasn't too long until we did date.

Carl Clift had been working in St. Louis at the General Motors plant in 1928, and when he returned home for Christmas he proposed to Mary Agnes. They were married on the sixteenth of December and she returned with him to St. Louis. Shortly after she left Gifford, her parents were notified that a local school had called her to teach.

CARL & MARY AGNES CLIFT (1928)

After graduating from Gifford High School in 1927, Gladys Paul took a job cooking and washing dishes at a Hot Springs restaurant, Stewdy's Chick-N-Dinners. She moved to Hot Springs and lived with a girlfriend who was working in the same restaurant. Gladys' stay there was cut short when she was summoned back home to Gifford by her mother, Florilla. Gladys' father, Joseph, had been temporarily blinded by some hot lead in his eyes while working in his shop. Gladys' help was now needed at home. Sometime later she was called away from home on another family emergency. This time her brother needed her help. His

wife was hospitalized and he needed someone to look after his children. Gladys stayed in McRae, Arkansas, with them for three weeks. "I was engaged to be married . . . when I went up there," she says, "so then I was just wanting to come back home. I stayed until his wife got out of the hospital and then I came home and in about a week I got married."

On April 21, 1929, Gladys married Clyde David Speer, a neighbor boy she had been dating for about seven months. When asked what Clyde was like, she described him as "just kindly bashful. He was bashful, more so that I was." When they married, Clyde was working in the timber business and doing odd jobs as well. On their "honeymoon" Clyde and Gladys went on a wheat harvest in the Midwest. They traveled to three states, rooming in boarding houses along the way. While Clyde went into the wheat fields to work, Gladys helped with the cooking at the boarding houses to pay her rent. She remembers that when they left one of the rent houses, the landlady gave her a set of silverware as a wedding present and as payment for some of the work Gladys had done.

Gladys' wheat harvest honeymoon in Kansas

Clyde and Gladys Speer (1929)

Gladys Speer and Mary Agnes Clift had been married only a short while before America was plunged into the Great Depression in 1929. Both women remember the hardships their families experienced during that time. Clyde Speer was forced out of his regular work and into taking odd jobs with the economic downturn. Gladys remembers that men "couldn't get work. They had what they called WPA (Works Progress Administration). They had to give the men a little work . . . they had to pay them fifty cents a day. . . . It was a hard go." Carl Clift had been working at General Motors in St. Louis, but when work there began to fall off, he decided that he and Mary Agnes should return to Arkansas to be near their families. Carl Clift was making $2.50 a week during the Depression, not enough to make the car payment on the Buick they were driving when they returned from St. Louis. Mary Agnes recalled:

> We just owed one payment on that Buick, and do you know they came all the way from St. Louis down here and got that car and took it back. Took it away from us. They wouldn't give us time to get it. Well then we were just afoot. We had to walk and it was about two and a half miles over . . . to his father's [house].

Money was scarce during the Depression. In all parts of Arkansas, "barter replaced money in trade. A gallon of milk or a dozen eggs might be traded for seed potatoes or even a piano lesson.....Doctors on house calls received a pig, a laying hen, or a sack of vegetables as their fees."[1] Mary Agnes remembered that she traded with a peddler that came by her house every week. In return for a dozen eggs she could buy ten cents worth of material, or matches, or salt – items her family could not produce for themselves. Carl grew sugar cane for molasses and trapped to supplement the family's diet. Mary Agnes remembered how glad they were anytime Carl caught a mink because they could sell the pelt for a "pretty good price." All the men in the Gifford community trapped, according to Mary Agnes, to provide their families with meat. "The Lord provided for all of us," she said, "some way or another."

In the midst of the economic crisis, Mary Agnes and Gladys both gave birth to their first children in 1930. Mary Agnes had a daughter, Mary June (Carver) and Gladys a son, named Clyde David, after his father. In 1930, the doctor's fee for delivering a baby was $25.00, but the lack of money meant that the doctor would be paid in goods, usually food. Mary Agnes paid the doctor with canned fruits and kraut, sausage, and homemade molasses. She said:

> It was depression times you know. Nobody had anything and [the doctors] were thankful to get anything you had to give them for a bill for coming to see you. They were proud to get it and they came anytime you called for them and it was worth something to have a doctor come to your home.

Gladys would probably not agree that anytime you called for the doctor, he came. When she delivered her second child, Ralph Eugene, in 1933, she did so without the assistance of a physician. She did not remember why the doctor was unable to come, but perhaps it was because of the bad weather since the month was January and she lived so far out of town. Her son was delivered by a neighbor, Azilea Bell. "She came by [our house] the night that he was born," Gladys remembered, "and she took the place of a doctor. I guess you'd call her a midwife. She was real good."

Gladys gave birth to four of her five children at home, and Mary Agnes six out of her seven. Their youngest children, both daughters, were born in the Malvern hospital. "They forced you to go then," said Mary Agnes, referring to the birth of her last child in 1950. After having two sons, Clyde (1930) and Ralph

(1933), Gladys had another son, Joseph in 1936. Her last two children were daughters, Shirley (Gray) born in 1941, and Wanda (Hankins), born in 1945. Mary Agnes' seven children were: June (Carver) born in 1930; Katie (Speer) born in 1932; Calvin, born in 1935; Gaylia (Hawthorne), born in 1938; two more sons, Noel and Norman, born in 1941 and 1944, respectively, and Dorothy (Dottie Bailey), born in 1950.

[1] **Fred Berry and John Novak, *The History of Arkansas* (Little Rock, AR: Rose Publishing Co, 1987), 202.**

The Clift family – Mary Agnes and Carl are standing back row second and third from right. Their children pictured here are June (center wearing white dress) Gaylia to June's left with bow in hair, Katie at far right next to Carl, standing below Katie is Noel and little boy in overalls in Norman. Also pictured are other members of Mary Agnes' family.

Gladys and Mary Agnes both agreed that hospital births were probably safer should any difficulties arise, but neither admitted to suffering any hardships by giving birth at home. "The children were taken care of at home," Mary Agnes reflected, ". . . everything went well and . . . I got along just fine at home and the babies did too." Childbirth, in keeping with tradition, was a strictly female affair, with the exception of the doctor, if one was present. Expectant mothers were usually attended through labor by many sympathetic female relatives and close

friends. "My mother would be with me," said Mary Agnes, and my husband's mother and an aunt of his and my sister . . . and the nurse would come with the doctor. So we had plenty of help."

Plenty of help that is up through delivery and recuperation, but once they were able to take control of their households, Gladys and Mary Agnes were faced with the enormous responsibilities of motherhood and homemaking. Clyde Speer began work for Hoskins Trucking Company in the mid-1930s, and Gladys remembered that he was gone a lot at night and sometimes she would be left to care for sick children by herself. Carl Clift also went into the trucking business. In 1935, with one truck, he started his own business, Clift Truck Line. Mary Agnes was also left many times with the sole responsibility of caring for her children.

Thomas David Speer Family

Members of the Thomas David Speer Family, including Clyde and Gladys at far right. Gladys is standing at the top right, Clyde is kneeling with son, Joe, in front of him. Standing next to Clyde but behind the little boy in the front are Gladys and Clyde's other sons, Ralph Eugene (at Clyde's shoulder) and Clyde Jr. next to the little girl with her finger in her mouth. Other individuals pictured are Clyde's parents, brothers and their wives and children.

Jo Ann Vanek estimates that in 1924 housewives spent about "fifty-two hours per week [engaged] in housework," and that the work week of these women was "longer than the work week of the average person in the labor force."[2] In the early twentieth century, most families:

> were rural, large and self-sustaining; they produced and processed almost everything that was needed for their

> own support and for trading in the marketplace, while at the same time performing a host of other functions ranging from mutual protection to entertainment.[3]

[2] Jo Ann Vanek, "Time Spent in Housework," in Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck, eds. *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 500.

[3] Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "The 'Industrial Revolution' in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the Twentieth Century," in Linda Kerber and Jane De-Hart Mathews, eds. *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 329.

Gladys and Mary Agnes both supported this observation in their interviews. They recall numerous activities varying from the processing of food and clothing to doctoring their children's various illnesses. Gladys remembered that one night while her husband was at work, her son Eugene, then an infant, began to exhibit symptoms of the croup. She treated him with a teaspoon of sugar and a drop of turpentine, which she said, "cleared it up."

Mary Agnes also recalled an instance when one of her children, Katie, an infant of five months, was gravely ill. "She just got sick all of a sudden, " Mary Agnes remembered, "I picked her little hand up one night and it was just as cold as it could be and her little fingernails looked kinda blue." Fortunately, Carl was able to get a doctor to come to the house. The doctor diagnosed Katie's problem as pneumonia. "He took her temperature," related Mary Agnes, "and she had a hundred and six. We worked with her all night long." The doctor put a little jacket on Katie that he had dipped in a hot solution of Vicks salve, turpentine and kerosene. Each time the jacket cooled, he would dip it again in the solution and place on baby Katie. The doctor and nurse stayed with Mary Agnes all night long. Mary Agnes recalled:

> When some of the women went home early the next morning, they were afraid maybe she wouldn't live, but they came back to see how she was and she was better. She was just a lot better. I stayed up all night long and all day the next day. And the next night I watched her close, but she did just fine. But it sure did scare me.

In addition to seeing after the physical well-being of their families, both women quilted and sewed. Mary Agnes remembered that when material was scarce, she would take pants that her husband had worn out and make clothes from the good parts for her young sons. Both Gladys and Mary Agnes spoke of cooking on wood stoves and of preserving food and meats so their families would

have food through the wintertime. The chore that the women remembered most clearly was the back-breaking task of laundering their families' clothing. Gladys recalls the drudgery associated with washing, drying and ironing clothes:

> We'd boil the clothes in a wash pot, wash them first, then we'd put them in the wash pot and boil them and take them out and rinse them in another tub of water and hang them out to dry on the clothes line. [You] had to have a rag for the [iron] handle, wrap something around the handle and put it on the stove and then iron away. When the iron got cold you'd have to put it back on the stove to heat it up again.

Mary Agnes told of washing in wintertime when snow would be on the ground. Both women agreed that the invention of many household appliances, like the washing machine, did somewhat lighten their workload. However, Mary Agnes admitted that at first she was skeptical about using an automatic washing machine. She said:

> I had gotten so used to the old way of doing until some of it I thought, "Well now that won't work." And I'd kinda say, "I don't believe I want a washing machine." But [my husband] insisted. He said, "Why everybody's getting those." And he said, "you'll just save you a lot of work . . . hard work." It's so much easier. After I got used to them and thought that they could do as good a job as I was doing.

In fact it was only through her husband's insistence that Mary Agnes received an icebox and an automatic dryer, which she feared would burn up her clothes. Gladys got her first washing machine sometime after 1949 and Mary Agnes, her Speed-Queen ringer-type washer, in 1941. Even though she still had to heat water to use in the machine, she had the wringer to wring water from the clothes, and thought it "the most wonderful thing [I] ever saw."

Another appliance for which Mary Agnes and Gladys remembered being grateful was the icebox. Carl Clift surprised Mary Agnes with one in 1937. She remembered the day quite vividly:

> We were having lunch and I saw the truck turn off in the yard and I said, "There comes somebody in with something on that pick-up that they must have the wrong house. I notice that they [Carl and his brother-in-law Dub Jackson] looked at one another, but they didn't say nothing. I said, "Well, I guess

> he'll find out when he gets up here." So he drove up and they got up and began opening the door. [Dub] said, "This is for you." Oh, and I thought that was the nicest thing. It was so tall and roomy. I was really proud of that because I could have my milk and butter and food and stuff in it that I wasn't used to having.

Before having an icebox, she kept her perishables in a number two washtub filled with cold water. The water had to be changed once a day at noon to keep the food from spoiling or the milk from souring. Gladys preserved her butter and milk by putting them in a bucket and dropping them down her well.

The Clift family at the dining table (l to r): Charles Carver, June (Clift) Carver, Norman, Carl, Dottie, Noel (standing), Agnes, Gaylia, and Calvin, 1955.

Both Mary Agnes and Gladys remembered enthusiastically the year that electricity was introduced into their homes. Gladys' house was wired for electricity in 1937, and Mary Agnes' home in 1939. Gladys recalled the days in her house before electricity: "We used to have to use old coal oil lamps and kerosene lamps. I guess we thought then we could see pretty good, but now I don't think I could see anybody with a kerosene lamp. We were so proud to get electricity." Mary Agnes expressed the same sentiment about kerosene lighting. "[The children would] sit around the dining table with a kerosene lamp getting their lessons," she related, "and I don't see how they could see." Ruth Schwartz Cowan estimates that by 1930, four-fifths of all households had been electrified, but in Arkansas only four out of ten rural dwellings were equipped with electricity by 1941. By 1950 in Arkansas, nine out of ten homes had been provided with electricity.[4]

Perhaps no other invention transformed the social life of the American

family as did television. Before the advent of TV, Mary Agnes remembered that one of the family and neighborhood gathering places was around the radio:

> I remember before we got television, the first radio. They had one radio in Gifford and the people would go every night to that home and sit around the wall and floor and listen at the radio. Listen at it and then stay a couple of hours and then all go home. Maybe we lived a couple of miles from them, but we didn't have a radio at home. Listening to news. That's all we had.

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[4] Berry, 211; Cowan, 330.

By the early 1940s, the Clift family had acquired their own radio. Mary Agnes remembered the morning of December 7, 1941, when upon returning from church, her family learned of the attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor. "They bombed Pearl Harbor," she said, "It was on Sunday, Sunday morning. We'd been to church and Sunday School and when we got home there it was. They was telling all about it and we hated it so bad." She admitted that she can remember very little about the war itself. In fact, her memories of World War II were often confused with the Korean conflict of the 1950s. Although she cared about what was going on in the world at that time, caring for her family consumed her time and thoughts.

The Clift family gathered in their living room (l to r): Carl, Agnes, Norman, Katie, Clyde Speer, Dottie, Noel, Gaylia.

Surprisingly, Mary Agnes did not recall that her husband came very close

to induction into the military during World War II. He was drafted, but fortunately was exempted from service due to the number of children they had at home, which at that time was nine – five of his own and four belonging to his brother-in-law. Carl and Mary Agnes were caring for their nieces and nephews while their mother was in a sanitarium. One of Mary Agnes' few memories from this period is of providing for all nine children out of the rations for their own five:

> We had tickets that we'd have to take you know. [Just so much was allotted] to each person in the family and at that time I had four of my brother's children with us and so that made us have to cut down what we would have had for my own family to help them you know. You could just have so much and it wasn't very much. It wasn't enough to help much.

Gladys Speer also remembered very little about the second World War, aside from providing for her four children out of the meager rations allotted to them.

Like many American women, Gladys Speer lived inside the private world of home and family all of her married life, but in 1948 her husband, Clyde, died at the age of 41, after a prolonged battle with throat cancer. At that time her oldest child, Clyde Jr., was eighteen years old and her youngest, Wanda, was three. She explained the drastic change that took place in her life when her husband died:

> I stayed at home and done the cooking and washing and everything. And then after my husband died, well I had to go to work. I moved to town so I could get a job. I worked until I retired, but it was still a hard go because I didn't make very much when I was working.

Gladys first went to work sewing in a garment factory. She had worked there only thirteen weeks when the factory shut down and moved out of Malvern. She quit her next job at the Double Deck Café so she could stay at home and watch after her youngest daughter until she started school. When Wanda went into first grade, Gladys began working for the City Laundry and Cleaners. "I done a little bit of everything," she recalled, "Was checker and presser and spotter and then I was in charge of dry cleaning." She worked at the laundry for over twenty years. After her retirement, she continued to work part-time for Pate's Cleaners. In 1971, she sold her house on East Mill Street and moved back to Gifford to live near her oldest son, Clyde, and his family. In 1951, Clyde had married his high school sweetheart, Katie Clift.

Gladys Speer, barely visible in back left corner, with other employees of the Malvern City Laundry. They are identified as: Mrs. Yancy, Maggie Williams, Mrs. Roxa Burris, Gladys Rice, Helen Douskart, Lois Raspberry, Mrs. Houpt, Laura [?] , and Elizabeth Fisher.

Thinking back on her life, Gladys admitted that had circumstances been different, she probably would not have gone to work. She explained, "I would have stayed at home and took care of my kids if I hadn't had to go to work, because the girls were small then. But I just had to go to work." When asked if there was anything in her life she wished she could have done, she could think of only one thing. "I would have liked to had a better job," she shared, "a better job than what I had but I didn't know, didn't seem like I could get one when I was working." She remembered that there were few job options available to women in those years, and agreed that women's options have improved dramatically. Yet, she still retained the belief that "there are some jobs that ought to be left up to the man instead of the [women]," and that "a woman ought to stay in a woman's place."

Mary Agnes expressed similar sentiments about women and work:

> I think there's some jobs that maybe are too hard for women. There are women just as smart as men and a lot of things they do better than a man. I think that they should have equal rights with men and draw as good a wages. I just don't like to see them having a man's job and I count working on a highway and in factories where you had to wear boots and helmets.

Unlike Gladys who wished she could have afforded the luxury of staying home with her children, Mary Agnes regretted that she never got to teach. Instead she

chose to marry, relocate briefly with her husband to St. Louis, and eventually to have children. Although she regretted missing the opportunity to teach, she remembered that year in St. Louis as the best time in her life. "We didn't have the little ones to worry with you know," she said, "[Carl] took me to so many places that I'd never seen you know and we went a lot of places." She added that her children never really worried her. In fact, she was thankful that they all turned out so well:

> They made good grades at school. And they went to Sunday School and church with me and their daddy. And I have lived to see all of them baptized. I thank the Lord every night when I go to bed for my children that He gave me to love.

Gladys expressed similar sentiments about her family. "I think I've got some real good children," she said modestly. Both women were especially grateful for the companionship provided by their children after the loss of their husbands. Mary Agnes and Gladys agreed that their children were most important in their lives, and both experienced the ultimate loss for a parent – the death of a child. Each lost one of their adult sons in the 1980s – Joseph Speer and James Calvin Clift. Both women were blessed with long lives and large families. Mary Agnes lived to be 94, passing away in May 2001 in Malvern, while Gladys lived to be 97, passing away in October 2003 in Little Rock, at the home of her daughter. Mary Agnes left behind six children, and eleven grandchildren; and Gladys four children and eight grandchildren, and between them, many great grandchildren.

Mary Agnes Clift
March 2, 1907 – May 7, 2001

Gladys Marie Speer
May 21, 1906 – October 30, 2003