

from the pen of
LYNN FLETCHER HOWARD

«DATA •1040101»
«Mxx» «First Name» «Last Name»
«Company»
«Address»
«City», «St» «Zip»

Dear «First Name»:

Do you remember a while back I wrote about my two aunts who were Harvey Girls in the early 1900's? I think I mentioned that I needed to devote one whole letter to you about one of those aunts, my Aunt Florence.

It's hard to describe this woman in a single word, or even a sentence. She was my surrogate grandmother, friend, teacher, and the best thing about her was that she was fun! Some in our family called her eccentric, some even called her "nutsy," but I called her delightful!

It's true that Aunt Florence had her idiosyncrasies, but that's what made her fun. What idiosyncrasies, you ask? Well, her speech, for one, which was peppered with "what-samacallit, thingamajig, and whoseywhatsits." She always wore men's tennis shoes with holes cut out for her corns, which she had on almost every toe. She always "sauced" her coffee to cool it no matter where she was ... fancy place or not. Always had a shopping bag with her filled with who-knows-what. (By today's standards she would be a candidate for "bag lady" status!) And, handkerchiefs were not to be used except for special going out occasions. Instead, we had to use well washed & ironed rags in which to blow our noses.

But, she always made me Kool-Aid with lots of sugar, took me into downtown Chicago to a movie everyday I was with her, and taught me how to stand my ground against the Big Guys in life. It was her fight with the telephone company, which lasted for many years, that accomplished the latter.

Aunt Florence and her husband, Uncle Emil, lived in the same house their entire married life, "out in the sticks" of

suburban Chicago. Early on, they got a telephone installed in their home ... it was a pay phone. Now that wasn't too unusual for the time. You put a nickel in and made a call ... simple. Well, sometime in the late 1940's the phone company increased their rates to 10¢ per call and were recalling all the old pay phones installed in people's homes, replacing them with a more modern telephone. It seems that on those old pay phones you could still make calls by inserting a nickel, even though the rates went up. That's why the phone company wanted to retrieve them.

Aunt Florence would have none of it. She felt that 5¢ was an adequate amount to be charged for a call and refused to give up her phone. No amount of threats or pleading would persuade her to give up that phone. This stalemate lasted for years, but there was nothing the phone company could do about it. Something in the way it had been installed prevented them from being able to alter this equipment without having access to it or cutting off all the others on the multiple party line. And, there was no way Aunt Florence would let "those phone company devils" come into her house. When they came to the door to collect, she would hand them a bag of nickels and send them on their way.

There are many more memories I have of Aunt Florence that will have to wait for another letter. Stories of how she would traipse me in and around Chicago at all hours of the night, how she played "King of the Mountain" with a nest of snakes, and lost ... plus more.

«First Name», I hope you had an "Aunt Florence" somewhere in your life, too. We all need a person like that to make us feel special and someone to do crazy things with.

God loves you, and so do I ... *Lynn*