

## ***Mary Veronica Neylon Pratt***

***(1907-2000)***

### ***Life's continuing journey***

#### **Mary's early years and a sketch of her parents**

Mary was born November 2, 1907 in Springfield, Massachusetts at 162 Northampton Avenue in a bedroom in the northeast corner of the house. She is the daughter of Daniel Andrew Neylon, a teacher, farmer and businessman from Hardwick, Massachusetts and Margaret Mary Flannery, a housewife and mother of nine children born between 1903 and 1918. Mary was the third child born, following her brothers, Daniel Joseph and William Michael. The siblings born after her were Susan Elizabeth, James Christopher, Miriam Josephine, Katherine Rita, Agnes Rosemary, and Francis Xavier. Mary's Uncle James Watson Flannery and Aunt Agnes Pope Flannery lived next door on Northampton Street while she was growing up. Grandma Susan Elizabeth Maher Flannery, the mother of Watson and Mary Margaret Flannery lived in one of the apartments in the house that Watson's family lived in. Watson and Agnes didn't have children for about 11 years, then had Rosemary and Frances Elizabeth. Later, when Mary lived on Bowdoin Street, Agnes, Rosemary and Frances lived with them for a while. The Neylon family lived at Northampton Street until 1924. Then they moved to Feeding Hills. They later lived on Massachusetts Avenue, West Alvord Street, Virginia Street and were living at Bowdoin Street in 1936 when Mary moved out and got married.

Mary's mother was a hardworking, God-fearing woman who was devoted to her family. She was a talented artist who left behind several paintings. She painted landscapes as well as objects like cornucopia. She painted in watercolor as well as oils. Daniel Neylon was an interesting entrepreneur. He went to Morse Business School, which was the equivalent of Baypath Business College. Morse was a two-year school. Daniel received an Associates Degree or the equivalent around 1894. His first and only teaching assignment was in Hardwick, Massachusetts. He had a one-room school and taught all eight grades. He did this for a couple of years then entered the business world. His first love was the butter and egg business. He traveled all over New England, Eastern Canada and New York to secure fresh eggs and butter. He would then sell them at his stores on North Main and on South Main. He later had several jobs in the accounting area. His last business venture was in real estate. Mary's father was not very handy around the house. He had a handy man by the name of Mr. Claus. The kids used to ask him if he was Santa Claus, but Mr. Claus was not too bright and Mary doesn't think he even knew what they were talking about. Mr. Claus mowed the lawn, raked it, and cleaned the cellar.

#### **Perspectives on Springfield at the time of her birth**

Springfield was an industrial center in 1907 with about 60,000 people. The Armory was a major employer. There were several industries near Mary's neighborhood. The Van Norman Paper Company, Hendee Company that made motorcycle parts, Indian Motorcycle Company and Knox Motor Company that made the Knox automobile. There were still many dirt roads. The Boston Post Road, Route 20, was the main east-west route and Route 5 was the main north south route. Pynchon Park was the big baseball park near the north side. Mother Pratt never went to a game but her father and brothers attended games there. She wasn't much of a baseball fan. Mother remembers riding in a Knox when she was around 10. It was an open touring car with leather seats. Mary remembers the World War I mustering of troops. She remembers many men marching downtown and a lot of hollering going on.

#### **Mary on politics**

Mary admitted that she really wasn't very political. When asked which Presidents she remembered, she said she remembered Wilson. Concerning Harding, she remembered the Teapot Dome scandal, which concerned illegal oil leases. Then she said scandals happened back then, and then there was Watergate with Nixon and Whitewater with Clinton so history seems to repeat itself in presidential politics. She remembered the conservatism of Coolidge. She also mentioned the cause and death of President Coolidge's son, John. She said he got a blister on his foot playing tennis and didn't take of it. It led to blood poisoning and he died from it. History recalls that the death of his son was cited as reason that Coolidge decided not to run for President in 1928. In the thirties, she remembers FDR's fireside chats.

#### **The Neylon children's education**

## James Christopher Neylon (1911-1973) and Carla Wilhelmina Melander (1910-1994)

Catholicism was and is a large part of Mary's life. Her first church was Holy Family on King Street and Eastern Avenue in Springfield. Mary's grammar school was Holy Family, which was operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph. A favorite memory from grammar school happened in 8th grade. An excellent teacher, Sr. Dellasalle always made them stand up and exercise their diaphragms by reciting "the diaphragm is the muscular partition separating the chest from the abdomen." This would have been around 1920. Her best friend in grammar school was Kate Collins. She went to Cathedral for three years, then her family moved to Feeding Hills, a town bordering Agawam Massachusetts. She went to Agawam High her senior year and graduated from there in 1925. All her brothers and sisters went to school. Dan and Bill graduated from Cathedral. Jim, Rita, Miriam graduated from Tech, Betty graduated from Classical, Agnes graduated from Commerce and Francis graduated from Trade.

### **Some early year memories**

Mother Pratt had a serious operation when she was seven years old. She had two big lumps behind her ears caused by inflamed mastoids. The doctor pierced her eardrums in an attempt to break the infection and allow it to drain. Mary's mother would go in the ears with a syringe to drain the fluid. The right ear did drain, but the left didn't, even with packing and the syringe. It was on this ear that the doctor had to perform a mastoid operation to reduce the swelling. He cut into the head behind the ear. At 10, Mother Pratt got St. Vitus Dance.

Mary remembers taking a long walk into the woods near what is presently Albermarle and Dunmoreland in Springfield when she was ten and noticed a nice, small choke cherry tree. She dug up the tree and hauled it home to Northampton Ave. Her brothers planted it and it lived a good many years.

In the summer before 8th grade, Mary's father rented a house in Blandford for the summer. While in Blandford, Mary would visit a local family who had girls her age. One time they asked if they could ride the family horse. Mary rode that horse bareback all afternoon, Betty wanted to ride the horse, too. When she mounted the animal, Mary slapped the horse on the rump and the beast started running around the yard and Betty started hollering. Mary's mother who was visiting this family too, came out of the house and scolded Mary. Betty wouldn't ride the horse again. Mary said that they had more people visiting from Springfield than you would believe, 18 to 20 every weekend. This caused a Mary's mother to cook and bake as much as when they lived in Springfield, so it wasn't too much of a vacation for her.

### **Charlie O'Connell and the Loughran connection**

Her first boyfriend was Charlie O'Connell. The O'Connells were friends of Mary's Aunt Susie Loughran. Mary's mother gave a reception in Springfield for Miriam Loughran when she married James Rooney in 1923. She got married in Washington, D.C. Miriam, by the way, was the first female to get a Ph.D. from Trinity College in D.C. At the Springfield reception, Mary's mother invited Aunt Susie and her friends, the O'Connells. It was at this reception that Mary met Charlie. According to Mary, Charlie had taken a liking to Miriam Rooney and felt badly that she had gotten married. Mary often wondered if he was going out with her because he couldn't get Miriam. At any event, Charlie later asked Mary to the Trinity College dance. Mary was 16 and Charlie was 22 and had graduated from Holy Cross and was a musician. He worked a day job as a music critic for the Springfield Daily News. For this first dance, Mary's mother bought her a red, beaded gown. She wore this gown and a blue, beaded gown Betty was given by a woman for whom Betty babysat to all the dances she went to. Charlie was 6' 2" tall, had dark hair and blue eyes. Mary's brother, Dan used to go out with Charlie's sister, Anita. They used to visit at the O'Connell's house. There never was a whole lot of money for dating so visiting at people's houses was a popular pastime. Mary went out with Charlie in 1923 and then mostly on weekends when he was around from 1924 to 1929. She remembers going to a Holy Cross Prom with Charlie. Her favorite subject in High School was recess.

### **Mary and Art's first meeting**

During this time, City Hall used to hire High School students to help write out tax bills. The summer after her senior year, she worked for City Hall writing out bills. When the survey crew would come in from the field, the girls would check out the boys. This is how Mary Neylon first eyed Art Pratt who began working for the city on the survey crew right after High School. He caught her eye. During this summer of 1925, the city had a party for the employees at Mountain Park, near present day Mount Tom near Holyoke. Mary went up there with her brother Bill and Ellen Lyons, and while there, Art Pratt asked Mary to dance and later asked if he could take her home. Mary asked her brother Bill if he thought she should let Art take her home, and Bill said, "go ahead." This is how Mary and Art met. After this for the next few years, he dated her occasionally. Mary's mother initially didn't approve of Mary dating Art because he was Congregationalist. This is the old Puritan religion. Art attended the Congregationalist Church in Court Square. She later warmed up to him. He was very good to Mary's mother.

## Remembering brother Dan Neylon

Mary remembered her brother Daniel Joseph as he passed over on April 3, 1996 at age 93. Dan was the oldest of the nine Neylon children and generally shy person. Dan raised chickens as a youth. He also grew feed indoors for his chickens in the winter. Dan played the saxophone and Bill played the trombone, banjo and the bass viola in the group called "The Mohawks." They played local clubs and events in the early 1920's. Dan had two sons. One named Patrick died of heart attack at age 46. The other, Brian Thomas who is about 49 years old in 1996, lives in Old Lyme, CT. His wife's name is Charlene and has two sons, Daniel Joseph is presently in college and Mathew Thomas, with long curly hair, is in high school.

## Mary's High School years

During High School, Mary was a member of the Catholic Girls Junior League. A professional fellow came to the meetings and directed several plays. Mary was in a couple of plays. She remembers singing a song about Marconi who invented the radio. During high school, she continued to occasionally go out with Charlie O'Connell. A year after they first went out, Charlie took a job with the Victor Talking Machine Company of Philadelphia writing about the music they would publish. When he returned to Springfield to visit his family, he would get together with Mary. She said she liked him but he was too moody. The group Mary hung around with included Ellen Lyons, Peg Kramer, Kay (Katherine) Lyons, Anita O'Connell (Charlie's sister), some other friends of Anita and Bill Neylon. Some of the members of her group thought Charlie was too old for her. Charlie used to take Mary horseback riding in Chico pee. You could rent horses there and ride trails. This was something Mary really liked. Mary used to spend more time socializing with Bill, Betty and Jim who were closer to her age than Miriam, Rita, Agnes and Francis. She would have socialized more with Dan but he pretty much stayed to himself.

## The post high school years and first jobs

After graduating from Agawam High School in 1925, Mary attended Miss Twitchell's finishing school, then later Springfield Kindergarten Training School, and graduated in June 21, 1921. The name changed the year Mary graduated and she had a ring with the initials SKTS on it. This school was similar to a community college. While she was going to school, Mary worked weekends at S.S. Kreske in downtown Springfield on Main Street as a clerk behind the jewelry counter. Her sister Betty (Susan Elizabeth Neylon) also worked there during this time in the music and record department. They worked from 9 or 11 in the morning until 9 at night. They got the princely sum of \$2.25 per day. If they went in at 9 A.M., they got from 11 A.M. to 1 P.M. off for lunch. They also got a supper hour from around 5 P.M. to 6 P.M. When they went in at 11 A.M. they would only get a supper hour. Mary remembers getting a big egg salad sandwich at the Kreske lunch counter and dividing it between she and Betty. Mary used to get out of work early to go out with Charlie O'Connell when he came up from Philly. While Mary was working at Kreske's, Mary's Aunt Margaret Neylon was operating her cleaning business. Her store was Neylon Cleaners on the Bridge Street on the corner of Bridge and Dwight Street. She specialized in French cleaning. She operated it about 20 years retiring around 1930. Aunt Margaret, besides gaining notoriety for some memorable belching in her later years, was quite a liberated lady for the 1920's. She had her own business and supported an aspiring actor named Walter who ended up moving to Hollywood and landing a singing part in a grade B movie in the 1930's.

Mary's sister Katherine Rita graduated from Westfield State College with a four-year degree in Education. Westfield had just changed from a two year Normal School to a four-year college. Rita's first job was in a one-room school like her father Daniel's, where she taught grades one through eight. Her first school was in Granby, Connecticut. Bill and Dan were supposed to go Holy Cross College. They were accepted and had the money saved, but their father needed the money and took it. They didn't get student loans in those days so that was the end of their college hopes. Dan, Bill and Betty did take continuing Ed. courses at Central (later Classical) High School in Springfield. Mary remembers that Bill took a course in Greek.

At Twitchell's, Mary got certified to teach kindergarten. She helped the kindergarten class at the Union Street School and received praise for her good work. Following graduation, she worked for the Potter Knitting Company as a telephone operator for about six months. After this, Mary subbed in the Springfield schools, mostly in the first grade. She tried to get a permanent job as a teacher but was never called. She was looking for permanent work. Later, around September 1928, Mr. & Mrs. Robert O. Brown hired her as a governess. The children were Betty Lou, 4 and Bobby, 7. Another graduate of Miss Twitchell's school who had worked for the Browns told them about Mary. She moved to New York City with the Browns, lived on Park Avenue and worked for them for a year and a half from September of 1928 to Easter-time of 1930. Mary remembers the stock market crash of October 29, 1929. She heard about the people jumping off of buildings as their careers, businesses and fortunes were ruined. She felt the irony of living in luxury on Park Avenue

while a few blocks away people were absolutely desperate.

She went to Miami with the family around Christmastime, 1929. It took two days on the train to get to Miami. They stayed at the Pan Coast Hotel and Lincoln Hotel. She ate with the children in the children's dining room at the Pan Coast Hotel. All the family ate together at the Lincoln Hotel. While in Miami, she met a fellow on the beach who said his wife worked for the man who had a big part in inventing TV. They lived in New Jersey. A friend of this fellow lived with Butlers who were old friends of MVP's family. Lilly and Dottie Butler are two girls Mary remembers. When the Butlers moved from Springfield to New Jersey, Mr. Butler told Mary's father that he would never be coming back and that he, Mr. Neylon, could have his burial plot in St. Michael's cemetery. The plot is still in Butler's name in the cemetery records, but it's the Neylon plot. Mary said there is one Butler buried there, but that person was buried so long ago that the Butlers didn't mind that the Neylons were going to use the plot. In fact, Jenny Donovan, a friend of Mary's mother, is buried on top of the Butler family member. While in Miami on vacation with the Browns, a policeman asked Mary out but since she didn't know his family, Mrs. Brown said she shouldn't go out with him, so Mary did not.

### **Joe Singleton, the plumber, Mary's first business job**

After she left the employ of the Browns, Mary worked for Joe Singleton, a plumber, as his bookkeeper and receptionist from 8 A.M. to 7 P.M. She did this for six months. While she was working for Joe Singleton, she went out with an Italian named Leon Silvane. Mary's father said to her mother, "God, don't let her go out with him, he'll knife her." Apparently, Mr. Neylon was not the most tolerant of fellows. In 1931, she left Joe Singleton to take a job with Package Machinery Company of Springfield. She was shaking when she told Joe she was leaving but she stood up to him and told him she was going to a higher paying job. Joe was very overbearing and Mary didn't particularly like working for him but she didn't have experience doing anything in business. This was her first business job, which she took to get the experience.

### **The Package Machinery Company years**

At Package Machinery, Doris Vincent, who eventually hired her actually wanted to hire Betty because Betty was going out with her brother, George, at the time, but Betty was happily working for Beaulieu Chevrolet, so Betty suggested her sister, Mary. She worked 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. Mary's duties were to check all the bills and enter expenses into a ledger. Then she wrote out checks, which were audited then signed by the owners. She also gave travelling money to the repairmen who fixed packing machinery as they would have to take the train or bus to get to the businesses which had the machines. These machines would wrap Hersey bars, salt-water taffy, or gum and various other consumer products. An employee of Package Machinery was Steve Boulter who invented the method of using a string that you pull when you open a pack of gum. As an employee, he got no credit or monetary reward for the invention. Steve later moved on and opened up his own package machinery company in New York. Mary earned \$15/week to start and after two months, she got a raise of \$2/week to \$17/wk. She eventually got up to \$25/wk. A memory she has of her job was a Christmas Party they had at the Highland Hotel in Springfield. The company gave everyone a box of Jensen Chocolates as a Christmas bonus. A friend of Mary's named Ruth was in charge of the party. She bought two favors for everyone. You got one when you went in the door and then had to find the matching one inside. The two favors she got were little pigs, Salome and Salome's friend. Mary still has these little pigs and has used them for over 50 years to decorate her Christmas tree.

### **More beaux**

Mary also went out with a fellow named Thomas Redmond McKenna. She called him TR or Redmond. She started going out with him after graduating from High School. The family had moved to Massachusetts Avenue in Springfield. TR went to Springfield College and lived in the same neighborhood. Mary's father did not like Redmond because he went to Springfield College, which was a YMCA college, and not a Catholic College. Mary went to a few dances with Redmond who was a Catholic. They would also go for walks in the parks. Brother Bill was always with Ellen Lyons during this time. Mary and TR would double date with Bill and Ellen and go places. Sometimes they all would go by trolley car. He was 6' 2" and had reddish hair. Mary also went out with a fellow named Wesley Southerland who was a friend of TR's during this same time. Wesley asked Redmond if he could date Mary and Redmond didn't mind. Mary was going out with these fellows around 1927 and 1928. After she and Redmond broke up, Mary went out Tom Lawson. He went to Baypath Business College. They went to different places with Bill and Ellen.

### **Romance with Art blooms, the engagement years**

Around Christmas, 1930, Eugene Arthur Pratt asked Mary to go to a DeMolay dance. This marked a changing point in their relationship. She felt different about Art than the other fellows she had been seeing so she only dated him after this. They became engaged in 1931 and got married in 1936. After Art proposed and Mary accepted, Mary checked out

## James Christopher Neylon (1911-1973) and Carla Wilhelmina Melander (1910-1994)

jewelry stores for rings and told Art which ring she had picked out. Years later, in the 1970's, Art told her to get a bigger diamond, but she couldn't turn in the original ring because it meant so much. The depression of the 1930's was one reason they did not get married earlier. They needed to save money and help out their families. Also Mary wasn't ready for marriage and the responsibilities of it. Some of the things they did together during their dating years were hiking the Appalachian Trail as members of the Appalachian Mountain Club. They also used to visit Anna Scott's family, Art's cousin Frank Sherman, and the Dudleys.

Betty and George J. Bagnall got married in November of 1937. They went out together for quite a long time. They broke up and went back together several times before getting married.

Miriam Josephine and Rita had the same taste in men. In 1934, Mary and Art took a trip to Hampton Beach, NH Art had just bought a new Oldsmobile and wouldn't drive it over 35 mph because it was a new engine. It took eight hours to get to Hampton. Now it would take 2 to 2 1/2 hours to get there by car from Springfield. Several other cars with other friends of theirs also went. Bill Neylon went on the trip. Bill was going out with Pauline Argenta at this time, a good Italian girl. Mary would sometimes spend the weekends with the Argentas who were nice people. Although Bill and Pauline liked each other, their relationship was doomed because of the feelings the Neylons had toward Italians. This was not unusual for the 1920's and 1930's. Ethnic families had a great deal of prejudice toward other ethnic groups. Many wanted the sons and daughters to just date and marry only people in their group. This started changing during and after World War II. There were about 20 in the group that went to Hampton Beach. The girls rented one room, and the boys rented another. Betty also went which made Mary's mother feel better about letting Mary go. Unfortunately, Art's mother became seriously ill during the week's stay at Hampton Beach and Art left early. She died shortly after that. Ellen Martha Pratt was diabetic and also had high blood pressure. Mary remembers going to the dog track in West Springfield while she and Art were engaged with Ed Bolin, a friend of Art. Ed couldn't understand how he could take Mary to the dog track, what with her being a Catholic and all. Mary doesn't remember winning anything at the track.

### **Mary and Art's wedding**

Both Mary and Art were born in 1907. They were both 28 when they got married in 1936. They got married at St. Michael's Cathedral on State Street at 9 A.M. on June 9, 1936 with Father Power officiating. He was the priest who gave Art instructions on the Catholic religion and baptized and confirmed him. Betty was the maid of honor and John Godfrey, Art's good friend, was the best man. After the service they went to the reception at the Stonehaven Hotel on Chestnut Street from 11 A.M. to 1 P.M. where there were just brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles since Mary paid for it. George Esben Pratt, Art's father never came to the reception. He didn't go to his son George's wedding so he wouldn't go to Art's. Mother Pratt doesn't know he didn't go except that he was a stubborn man and wouldn't do anything that he didn't want to do. There were 34 people at the reception and Mary paid \$1.00 a plate for the chicken dinner they had. She borrowed on her life insurance to finance the wedding. Such was the way you got by during the depression. You made due with what you had and were happy with it. Art's brother, George, gave them five dollars for a tip for the hotel dining room. George Bagnall asked Mary to have a drink in the bar, but Mary's father said to her, "You'll not go into the bar", so she didn't. This was after she was married and she still listened to her father even on her wedding day. After the Stonehaven reception, Mary's mother had a reception at the family house on Bowdoin Street where neighbors, friends and other relatives came. There were 50 or more people who celebrated the wedding.

### **The early years of marriage, 1936-1940**

After they got married, they stayed with Art's father for a month until they moved into their own place. They rented an apartment on Worthington Street on the 4th floor. It had three rooms with a bath. They stayed there about a year. Mary's mother didn't have any borders with her and said she was going to move so Mary and Art moved into the Bowdoin Street house so Mary's mother would have some income. They had their own bedroom and living room with a fireplace. It was here that Ellen Mary was born in 1938. They then moved to a second floor apartment on 22 Ainsworth Street. This had six rooms, 3 bedrooms and 1 bathroom. David Arthur was born there in 1940, as was Miriam Veronica in 1941. There are only 13 months between David and Miriam. The family was at the Ainsworth apartment for about 1 1/2 years. They moved from there to the first house that they owned, 54 Commonwealth Avenue. The day they moved in was the day the U.S. declared war in 1941 which was December 8. It had 7 rooms with 4 bedrooms, 1 bathroom and a good size hall where they had a player piano and a bookcase. "Coming home on a wing and a prayer" was a song that got a lot of playing time. The Pratt children would get the neighborhood kids to come in, and then they would start the scroll, pump the pedals, and move their hands nimbly over the keys. They fooled the neighborhood kids quite a bit with this trick. Mary stopped working for Package Machinery before Ellen was born. The company called her back to work part time in 1939 and she worked there until David was born in 1940. All told, she worked for them about 10 years.

## **Tales of the Pratt babies**

Christine Marie was born in 1943, and then there were two miscarriages. Philip was born in 1947. He was given the middle name of Gerard who is the patron saint of pregnant women and to whom Mary had prayed after having two miscarriages. Mary Frances was born in 1949 and Elizabeth Anne was born in 1951 shortly after Mary had passed the age of 44. She said she spent five and half years of her life pregnant. As babies, David was an excellent baby. At the 2 A.M. feeding, he would get her up, start feeding then fall asleep, which was wearisome. David and Ellen had the whooping cough when Miriam was born. Mary put Miriam on the back porch during the summer of 1941 to keep her away from her brother and sister. She never did get the whooping cough. None of the babies had the colic. Chris sometimes cried a lot. One night when Mary's mother was visiting, Chris was crying a lot and Mary's mother told her to put Chris on the back bedroom and let her cry and she eventually cried herself to sleep. She might have had an ear infection as Mary noticed a discharge after that. She put all the kids on the back porch at different times as babies so they could get the fresh air. She did this in summer or winter. She just bundled them up in the winter. She remembers Philip sweating with all the clothes she put on him in the winter. For neighbors on Commonwealth Ave., there was a Mrs. Gillette who got up early, and sat on the front porch all day and knew everybody's business. Mary remembers that whenever the city's horse and wagons came by to pick up the rubbish and the ash cans in the cellar, the horses seemed to always drop some manure in front of Mrs. Gillette's house. Mrs. Gillette would call her husband, "George, come out with the shovel!". She would have him put the manure on the rose bushes.

## **Family gatherings in the early years of marriage**

For family gatherings during these years, the Pratt's would often invite other families to their home. Among these were Pearl and Fred Bowen, Edith and her girls, Martha and Francis, Grandpa Pratt would always come but many times he would have to leave early and go back to work at the Electric Light Company. At some of these family gatherings, they would sit 20 down to dinner.

## **Tales of the Pratt Children**

The family moved to 60 Fairfield Street in 1954 to accommodate the larger family. The house had 11 rooms, 7 bedrooms and one bathroom. Miriam and Chris shared a bedroom until Chris moved to a room in the attic with her bed and dresser. Father Pratt had it wired for electricity. Mary and Liz shared a room. Ellen was a beautiful, tall, very intelligent girl. Chris remembers Ellen telling Mother Pratt that perhaps Chris was too young to wash the dishes at 5 years old. Philip remembers Ellen making the first casserole in the house. He was amazed that something could be cooked other than boiled or baked. Ellen was accepted to Westfield State early in her senior year and was planning to become a teacher. She died in a tragic auto accident in January of 1956. In 1962, after David went off to the Army, Mary's father became ill, was put into the hospital, and the hospital staff wanted to release him to a nursing home. Mary wouldn't have that and she took her father in. He moved into room which Liz and Mary had shared. Mary was now in Ellen's old room and Liz moved into David's old room. Daniel Andrew Neylon lived to his 92nd year and died in 1966. When Chris moved back to Springfield from Minnesota in 1967, she moved into Philip's room and used Daniel's as a study. Daniel's bed became the guest room bed at Ashbrook Street and Chris and Bill got it when they got married. In 1996, Daniel's great grandson Louis Arthur Consoletti, who shares his January 15th birthday, sleeps in his bed. Mother Pratt remembers that, as a child, David used to love to move furniture around. When Chris was in kindergarten, she used to love to wash dishes standing on a chair in front of the sink. Chris remembers that Miriam used to eat raw hamburger off the plate in the refrigerator. David also partook of this delectable treat. Miriam also used to eat Kleenex tissue. She taught Chris how to do this. Once when Mother was washing a baby in the sink, and had to go away to answer the phone, Miriam ate some soap and her upper lip swelled out something awful. Mother remembers Phil's first day at kindergarten. He screamed bloody murder on the way to the school. He calmed down some after they arrived and Mother left him there. Shortly after, the principal called Mother. In the background Mother could hear Philip screaming, the principal told Mother that she would have to come and get Philip. They couldn't do anything with him and he was disrupting the whole school. Phil did adjust to school, but he constantly got into fights. Chris used to meet him halfway home from school. Many times, she would find him rolling around on a lawn in a fight and have to pull him off and lead him home. Chris used to tell Mary that she was adopted and have poor Mary crying. She would say that Mother would lie and tell her she really was her child but that Mother was only saying it because she didn't want Mary to feel badly. Mother remembers that during the winter of Chris' kindergarten year, she didn't have rubbers or boots. Chris wanted to go to school so Mother Pratt put plastic bags around her feet and sent her off to school. The teacher thought that was quite ingenious. It didn't bother Chris at all. At Easter-time in the Pratt family, the girls would get straw hats and decorate them with ribbons and colors and Mother would get flowers for them. They also got Mary Jane patent leather shoes.

## **Art's work at City Hall and other jobs**

During the child rearing years, Art Pratt worked three jobs. His regular job was as an engineer for the City of Springfield in the department of Streets and Engineering. Art was a very able civil engineer. He never attended college but acquired his skill and acumen as an engineer on the job. He first became a licensed surveyor and later passed the exam for registration as a civil engineer in both Massachusetts and Connecticut. He was responsible for getting the first level grade railroad crossings installed in Springfield. Mother Pratt remembers taking the inventor of these devices out to dinner. Twice he aspired to be Superintendent of Streets and Sewers. Once the lack of a college degree stopped him, the second time politics ended his chances. Before work he loaded milk trucks for Mallory. At nights and on weekends in the 1950's he worked at a bowling alley setting pins at 25 cents a game. Also at night, he used to do special surveys for people. In the late 1960's and seventies, he worked for Jack Smith as a consulting engineer.

### **Mary's girl scout leader days and some random family memories**

In 1956, after Ellen died, Mother Pratt went into Girl Scouting as a leader. Anna Sayers and Alex Gorman were her assistants. She had weekly meetings where they learned about home making and caring for a family. For learning these things, the girls would get little awards. Mary also prepared them for the annual summer camp in Otis. During the course of Mary's three years as a leader, Father Pratt had 3 homemade baked beans and hot dogs or hamburg dinners to raise funds for Mother Pratt's group so there would be money for the girls to go to camp who couldn't afford it otherwise. Mother Pratt essentially raised the seven children alone. To maintain her sanity, there were rules to follow and every one of her children had chores to do. Bedtime was 8 P.M. when you reached grammar school. When you came home from grammar school there were homemade cookies on the table. Chris' favorite was gingersnaps. Afterward you did your homework. At dinnertime, everyone helped set the table, and took turns doing dishes afterwards. The older children helped take care of the younger kids after school. On Saturdays, the entire house got cleaned which included vacuuming, polishing, dusting, making beds and anything else that needed getting done.

To get some help raising the children, Mary would take in State kids. These were children who for various reasons became wards of the state. The state would allow them to live with approved families and pay a certain rate for their food and keep. Mother has memories of one named Josie. She went to Forest Park Junior High. She wanted to go to the 8th grade prom. The family got her a gown and corsage. She had trouble telling the truth. She stayed about six months. Florence was another State kid who came to Pratt's from Florence Moynahan's house. She had lice and Ellen, David and Mother Pratt herself got infected and had to treat their hair. Mother Pratt went to Flo Moynahan's one Labor Day weekend in 1943 and they picked lice out each other's hair. They pulled the shades down and put a sheet on their laps and pulled the lice eggs off.

Since Father Pratt's time with the family was limited mainly to Sundays, they were always special. The family would go to the 8 A.M. mass at Holy Name, followed by a big breakfast of pancakes. Father Pratt would make pancakes in the form of animals for the children. During the warmer weather, the family would go to Forest Park for the day. They would walk around and look at the animals, go to the swings and playground for awhile, then have a picnic lunch. Often, Father Pratt would build a fire and cook hamburgs. After lunch, they would enjoy the park some more, then go home. In the colder weather, they would still go Forest Park to sled and skate. Sometimes they would go to Look Park in Florence Park and sometimes they went to the DAR State Park near Orange, Massachusetts. Other times they went to a state park near Brimfield. Once, they went to Brimfield right after a hurricane or flood and the water was so high they couldn't stay.

### **Family vacations at Soundview**

In the summertime, the family would take a two-week vacation down to Soundview. near Old Lyme, Connecticut on Long Island Sound. Mother Pratt would give the children a set amount of money to spend for the whole vacation, maybe \$5.00, which was a big thing to all the kids. Chris would buy a kite, Italian ice, coloring books, postcards, stamps, and ride the merry-go-round. Father Pratt would not shave for the two weeks, which was a big treat for him. At night, they would take walks on the beach and often play cards together. One summer the family tried vacationing in Vermont, but they didn't like it as much as the shore.

### **Family Pets**

Some of the family pets were Boots the cat on Commonwealth Avenue, who had white feet. Winky the dog came to the Pratt's in the 1940's. His previous owner, a man, abused her. When she first came to the family, she would wet every time she saw Art until she got used to him. There were always cats around the house. Many times their names were Missy. Mrs. Rogers was going down the street one day with two cats in a bag and was planning to take them to the SPCA. Mother

James Christopher Neylon (1911-1973) and Carla Wilhelmina Melander (1910-1994)

Pratt said she would take them. One of them was Missy and the other was a yellow cat. The yellow cat got distemper and had to be put to sleep. Missy lived to be 16 years old and died in 1973. One of her kittens was Silky, a male. Silky was Chris' cat. Silky was probably gay and a little slow. Silky would care for Missy's kittens, giving them baths. Silky would take naps on a windowsill. Outside the window was a lilac bush. One time, some birds were singing on the bush. Silky decided to attack even though he was in the house. He crashed headlong into the window. As mentioned before, he was a little slow.

## **World Wide Travelers**

After Father Pratt had a coronary in 1965, Mother and Father Pratt started taking more time for themselves. They became world travelers after David got his job with TWA in 1967. They traveled to Hawaii, China, Europe, Africa, South America, Australia and India. They traveled to the Holy Land. Mother especially liked Greece. She said everything there was so old. She liked the fact that they saved their relics and ruins. Also the people there were so friendly. Mother Pratt always liked visiting Hong Kong. They would visit Fr. McKiernan who was in charge of the Fr. Francis X. Ford hostel. Mary remembers Father Ford as a very tall, handsome man. He unfortunately was killed in communist China the 1930's uprising because of his faith. He was dragged through the streets naked along with a nun. On a happier note, Mary and Art once traveled to Africa. They went on a safari and brought hand carved wooden implements and other artifacts. On a bus tour, they met an Argentine couple. They were both lawyers in Buenos Aires. The man spoke only Portuguese but the woman was bilingual. Both couples stayed in the same hotel and hit it off really well. The Argentine couple told the Pratts that if were ever in Buenos Aires to look them up. The Pratts were planning to go South America on their next trip so they planned to see them again. When they got to Buenos Aires, Mother Pratt had a man at their hotel call the lawyers' house. Their 16 year-old daughter answered and although the parents were out of time, she was instructed to take the Pratts to dinner, which she did. The next day the couple came back and showed Mother and Father Pratt the town. The moral here is if you ever tell Mother to look you up if she's in the neighborhood, she will.

## **Mary's special relationship with her cousins and siblings**

Mary was always close to her siblings and many of her cousins. They would help each other any way they could. Her cousin Francis Elizabeth Flannery, Franny, a nurse, would always take time off when Mary had her babies. This is the reason Mary Frances Pratt has her middle name. When Mary's sister Miriam's children needed a place to stay while they were going to college, Mary let them live at her house. Veronica Miriam Kearns was one of these children. Miriam's son John Joseph Kearns lived with the Pratts for part of a school year also after his family moved to New Jersey. When Francis Xavier Neylon's wife Mary Martha was having Aileen, Mother Pratt took Butch for a couple of weeks. Butch stood on the porch every day and announced to everyone who came by that he was staying there because his mother was having a baby. When Bill's son, James Martin (Jimmy) Neylon, had his tonsils out, he recuperated at Mother Pratt's house.

## **Ashbrook Street years**

In 1973, Mary and Art moved to 110 Ashbrook Street. It has 7 rooms, with 2 baths and a full basement. Chris had a room and study upstairs until she moved out and married William Louis Consoletti in 1975. Sometime later, Mary moved in for awhile. While she was there, Lynn Veronica Chaput (Miriam Pratt's daughter) lived in the basement for awhile. The two upstairs rooms are now guest rooms and all the sons and daughters spend time there from time to time. Father Pratt passed November 23, 1981. They were married 45 wonderful years.

## **Mary Pratt in 1996**

These days, April 1996, Springfield is a financial, medical and industrial center of about 150,000 people. Mother Pratt enjoys her six surviving children, her eleven grandchildren, and, counting Richard Earley's children, six great Grandchildren. Lynn and Ted Lapierre gave Grandma Pratt precious Carolyn LaPierre and to that we can add Mary Frances' stepdaughter Mary McCuen's two children, Daniel and Mathew. Richards's son William and Andrea had William Alexander, his daughter Linda and Rene has a daughter, Trisha, and his daughter Sharon and husband Steve have a daughter named Lisa. She still travels with senior citizens, and usually goes to Georgia to visit Chris and Bill once a year.

## **What means the most in life**

The things in life that mean the most to her are having all her children agreeable and having all her children friendly and loving toward one another. She absolutely hates arguing. Chris never remembers her parents ever having an argument.

James Christopher Neylon (1911-1973) and Carla Wilhelmina Melander (1910-1994)

The values she wants to pass on to the younger generation are to be morally good and not become prejudiced and intolerant of others.

### **The best parts of her life and her favorite meal**

The best parts of her life were after the kids were gone and she and Art could do as they pleased. She also had a very active social life in the 1920's. Her favorite color is blue. Asked to name her favorite meal, she said boneless chicken, Caesar salad, clam chowder, mashed potatoes and gravy, and winter squash. For dessert she would have apple pie and cheese.

### **Honors from Mercy Hospital**

One of the honors she has received is from the Mercy Hospital which appreciated all the volunteering she did there. They made her an honorary member of the volunteers.

### **What she'd do differently**

If she had it to do all over again she would not be quite as strict as she was raising her children. Mary did what her mother had done before her. Her life is an example of unselfish love and caring for her family and her fellow man. We need more people on earth like Mary Veronica Neylon Pratt.

Prepared by Bill Consoletti, a fortunate fellow who came into her life by marrying her daughter, Chris.

April 15, 1996

Respectfully transcribed and revised by James Christopher Neylon, Jr.

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