

# **Fairview Bungalow**

Special Times Bring Special Girls.



**S. Forrest Nomakeo**

## FAIRVIEW BUNGALOW

I have to tell you about the life of an exceptional girl born at an extraordinary time in a town called Fairview. My mother, shared stories about her life constantly, and I listened... she had plenty to say, for it was an exciting time to live and she had been a willful child.

“You should put your story in writing.” Often, I repeated those words, she had the ability, but she never did. Yet, I remember her story, every word. Born Helene Shirley, named for her aunt whom she never warmed to and didn’t care for the name, she began insisting on being called by her middle name. It worked at home, but at school—she was still Helene.

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Helene Shirley McKissick was a willful child, who gave her mother cause to massage her brow and say such things as, “Why can’t you be more like your sister?”

She heard that statement often from her mother. Winifred was a striking woman, with soft, brown eyes, and dark hair that she wore in the Gibson Girl style, piled loosely on top of her head in a large bun, flattering her oval face. Her heavy arms often deep in the tub of the new washing machine, but this day, she was focused on her daughter as she scurried past her toward the door.

“Shirley, slow down! Watch those linens near the stove.”

Mornings, Shirley sat up, and touched her toes on the brick that lay cooled, wrapped in the sheets gathered at the end of the bed. A new day to explore the farm and meet with the cousins across the field.

Her older sister, Gertrude, would have been settled by then, reading or writing a school assignment after doing chores. Her brothers, already outside, were helping their pa work the farm. Bud was handsome and tall like his father, Arnold, younger than Bud by two years, was Shirley's favorite, always teasing and helping her get out of many scrapes, his smile was infectious, his blue eyes engaging, and he had a mop of unruly, black hair.

The depression and two World Wars touched their lives, but their parents, George and Winifred, persevered. Yet religion was a contentious weapon that pierced the harmony of their content.

"Where is that child?" Winnie asked exasperated when it came time to settle in.

She stepped out onto the back porch and peered across the acres of corn stalks and dusty soil between the fertile field and the barn. Her hand shielding her eyes from the setting sun revealed no sign of her errant child, so she fetched Arnold to go out to find her.

Shirley was hanging from her favorite tree out in the orchard, smelling the nectar of the apples, and dreaming of the people and places she read about in books, so she lost all track of time. Arn crept up and scared the daylights out of her. Her knees buckled, almost dropping her from the limb. Arn was quick to grab her as she frantically tried to kick him in frustration—as apples thumped to the ground.

"You're a big tease," she railed.

“Ma would take a switch to your scrawny legs if she saw you hanging by your knees, in all your glory. That’s not how a young woman behaves.”

“She won’t find out if you don’t tell her.”

“What do I get in return?”

“You already have the nickel I earned feeding chickens for Mrs. Bieler.”

“Yes, that was when I helped you catch the chickens you let loose, for you felt sorry for them when ma was fetching them for dinner.”

“I don’t have anything else to give you, except the book ma brought home from town last week, but I haven’t finished it yet.”

“I know... you can do my chores, one day next week.”

“I’ll tell pa.”

“Then I’ll tell ma.”

“All right, I give, I’ll do your chores—for one day. It’s a stiff fine.”

After dinner, Winnie called Shirley into her bedroom, and presented her with a new play-dress and pants set she had made from an old set of curtains.

“I’ll make another set, but you must wear these if you continue to hang upside down like a monkey, and you’ll have to wear the pants or stay upright.”

“He told you, it was Arn who squealed on me.”

“No, Mrs. Phelps told me, and added a few other complaints.”

“Do I still have to do the chores for Arn?”

Arn was thrashed by their pa for trying to get out of his chores, yet not as severe as one other time when pa used the strap on both boys for waking up late. This time, Arn blamed Shirley and mouthed to her that she was going to pay, and Bud’s stern, dark gaze confirmed the threat.

All was righted when Arn crawled in through her bedroom window late one night, and needed her cooperation to arrive unnoticed. She stared at him as he put his finger to his mouth, while Gert stirred and shifted beside her; then, she watched him with big eyes as he padded through her room and out the door into the hallway.

George McKissick’s family had immigrated from their temporary residence in Canada before he was born. George’s father was originally from Aberdeenshire, Scotland and left for Canada as a young man, he married Isabelle Dearden in Richmond, Quebec. A rather large family, they settled in western Massachusetts in the Fairview section of Chicopee, and built homes on rented farmland within an earshot of each other.

George was a stoic Scot, a strict Congregationalist, and a very hard worker who insisted his sons follow his example. Winnie was a Catholic, of Irish and French descent, and occasionally a war of religion broke out in the house.

“If you hate Catholic’s so much, then why did you marry one?” Winifred often asked the reasonable question.

Winnie had secretly smuggled every one of her children out to be baptized, she believed they needed the sacrament. George didn't find out until years later, after he had mellowed a bit with age. Still, he believed it was a foolish notion, but the legitimacy of the pope was another matter. On those occasions, Shirley ran from the house as arguments escalated, covering her ears until the quarreling couldn't be heard. Then she'd collapse to the ground and remain there and let the silence overtake her.

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One day, she found Arn sitting by Mrs. Phelps's barn smoking a corn cob pipe. He had positioned himself perfectly so the interfering woman couldn't see him or his tell tale trail of smoke from her window. There he would be alerted of any on-comers as well. This day, the meddlesome neighbor saw Shirley and knew she was talking to someone, Winifred received the report of her daughter colluding with boys behind her barn.

"I wasn't, ma, I was play-acting. I don't like boys... they stink."

Shirley couldn't lie to her mother, it showed in her face, and her story rang true, so Winnie put her money on Shirley's version instead of the prying neighbor's imaginings. However, Shirley was restricted to the farm. No more fodder for Mrs. Phelps, who could ruin the reputation of her fun-loving child of fantasy. Any word of Arn's smoking would mean another thrashing for him, so Shirley took the blame on herself—a little white sin of omission by never mentioning that Arn was involved—it cost him a nickel.

Often the family packed up to visit the wood lot George had purchased with his five brothers, located about ten miles away, in Belchertown. Shirley begged to stay home, for the trip was a

painful memory for her. She was left behind on a previous visit. Striking out on one of her adventures, climbing birch trees to ride the flexible white limbs to the ground, she lost track of the time. With every step, she longed for the shelter of her mother's arms, for behind her the sounds of the woods were caused by every horrible creature she could imagine. When she returned to the campsite, there was no one there. She called out and cried for hours, she collapsed to the ground from exhaustion, and in the ensuing silence, she feared a life alone in the woods. Then, she heard Arn's voice calling out to her. He remembered the single majestic oak surrounded by a trio of pine trees where they had their picnic, and found her there.

"Shirley, there you are!" Her mother cried out as Arn stepped out to the main road, Shirley in tow.

Winnie hugged her terrified daughter and apologized, gazing upon her by the flickering light of the lantern casting the effect of a motion picture. It was eerily dark and the sounds; imaginary or otherwise still plagued her. The ride home was spent clutched in her mother's arms, afraid to wake alone in the desolate gloom.

Several weeks passed, Shirley had stayed near her home and her mother. She helped with chores which concerned her mother, for it wasn't like Shirley to be so clingy or interested in housework. She even offered to help Gert, who shooed her away like a pesky kitten.

"Go outside, you're in the way!"

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The timing was right, Shirley was feeling secure enough to get back to her normal routine. She spotted the large black umbrella leaning up against the chicken coop and looked over to the pile

of manure, the source of that familiar barnyard smell. Her imagination took over and Shirley thought she'd fly over the pile, and even further, if it all worked out—maybe even past Mrs. Phelps, now that would give her something to talk about. Climbing to the peak, she took the leap, and instead of floating away like a baby bird to wing, she plummeted, landing up to her thighs in muck, still holding the twisted, inverted umbrella. A witness to the entire show, Arnold scolded her then laughed before Bud and he grabbed an arm each and heaved. The boys presented her to their ma who screamed and ordered her to stay put. She gathered rags and then brought Shirley to the rain basin while discarding her clothes that were beyond saving.

“Gert would never do such a thing, why can't you be more like her?”

Ma glanced at the ruined umbrella she had used the night before.

“My new umbrella, I only used it once.”

“It looks like one of Arnold's erector set creations,” Bud said and laughed.

Shirley could see the burgeoning smile behind her mother's folded fingers.

“I'll have to make another play-set, so you'll have to fetch some more buttons for me.”

For years Winnie had sent Shirley out to the field to collect buttons left by the rag man, and her youngest and most fanciful child believed they grew there along with the buttercups and lady slippers. This child was a mystery, full of life and whimsy.

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The neighboring city of Holyoke was a bustling metropolis with trolley cars, department stores, and an amusement park. When her father became ill, Shirley went there to live with her grandmother and resentful aunt, her namesake, for several years. Gert took over the chores, the boys labored at the farm, and Winnie went to work as a telephone operator.

Three years later, Shirley went home to a happy household. They were one of the first families to own a television and a Ford. They didn't suffer as much as others during the Great Depression, Shirley was ten years old, and they were well-to-do, living off the bounty of the family farm. Pa planted the outer two rows of the cornfield for the needy, who were free to take their share. When the chickens started disappearing, he kept an eye on them, people were starving.

Pa claimed, "I can spare only a few chickens, seems they need them more than we do."

They didn't go to the beach in those years either, the threat of Polio was great and the fear was real. Shirley survived an outbreak of diphtheria in the nursery at the hospital where she was born, as a precaution, she was kept in the room with her mother. She was also exposed to Tuberculosis from Uncle Donald who served in WWI, and she carried the scars on her lungs her entire life. Winnie also bore a scar, that Shirley traced when she removed her necklace, she had surgery to remove part of her thyroid, there were some breakthroughs in medicine, but in the coming years the advances would be astounding.

Shirley came down with pneumonia when she ran home from school after being unfairly scolded. They thought they might lose her, but ice baths and the doctor's home visits saved her. That year Christmas was special, the family rejoiced at their health and happiness. Christmas Eve was a chore for Winnie and George, the children went to bed at night as usual, and woke up to a

decorated tree, assembled gifts, stockings filled with goodies, and exhausted parents. Christmas dinner had to be prepared as well, and a few days earlier, Shirley found herself again in the field, knee deep in snow, crouching with her hands over her ears, and trying to escape the awful sound of slaughter of the main course, a 50lb sow, worse than a civil defense siren.

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One day Shirley opened the door of the bungalow to see an astonishing sight, a man slumped over the rail. Covered in soot, his hair and clothes were singed and smelling of rotten eggs. He was a neighbor whose shack had blown up from a gas leak. Pa took the man inside and sat him at the table, he was inebriated which probably saved him. Fox was an old friend of pa's whose luck in some areas had run out. During the war, he had already been jettisoned from the back of a transport vehicle and into an open manhole. Another time, Gert found him in a snow drift, brought him in to thaw him out, and served him tea. This was simply another brush with fate.

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Weather permitting, Shirley tested her skills on the boys' bike and put her feet on the handle bars while she rode the slope into the driveway of the bungalow with hands free and feet off the pedals like one of the gliders landing across town at Westover. The pants-set ma made served many other purposes, as well as her acrobatic antics in the orchard. The running board on the horse drawn wagon was another fun place to play as pa brought the team into the yard. Running alongside, she gauged her speed, jumped onboard, and grasped the side rail while planting her feet on the platform. One warm September afternoon, a few weeks after her thirteenth birthday, Shirley slipped while trying to gain a foothold on the running board of the wagon, and was run

over. Luckily it had rained and she was resourceful. By shifting under the weight of the wagon and rolling her hips under the pressure of the rear wheel, she prevented serious injury.

Sheets and several clothespins fell to the ground as Winnie watched in horror until her child jumped up and ran toward the orchard.

“She must be all right if she can jump up and run like that,” Gert agreed.

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Timing is everything, and at thirteen years and two weeks, her courses started—Shirley thought she was facing certain death from the wagon accident. For days, she dealt with the thoughts of a fatal injury herself, but finally went to her mother to announce that she was dying, sorry for all the trouble she caused, and to whom her worldly belongings would go. At first, Winnie laughed in spite of Shirley’s grim prospects. She couldn’t understand what was so funny on the advent of her death.

Her ma thought she would be a child forever; therefore, she never explained the changes she’d undergo in the coming months. Winnie thought she had more time with her youngest child before adolescence was upon her, for she was so skinny and still ran like a boy.

“You’re not dying, dear child, have Gert show you what to do.”

Gert was less than accommodating. “Well, now you’re a woman, and you can have a baby.”

She stood on the threshold with the paper bag and the necessary contents clasped to her chest.

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We're all molded by our life experiences. My mother had her share.

It was the year 1935, Gert was now a college graduate and drove the family car. Bud and Arn worked selling rags, paper, and Mellin's Food, a life saving substitute for mother's milk. Shirley aspired to be a gym teacher and like Gert, set her sights on a college education,

The hopes and dreams of the family were shattered. After a short illness, Winnie died of kidney disease, Pa went into a deep depression, and the boys had to get permanent jobs. Gert worked as a school teacher and supported the family. Shirley had to finish her last year of high school knowing her mother wouldn't be there to see her graduate.

Shirley's friend Velma, whom she met in eighth grade, was a great source of comfort at this critical time. Velma's family helped her endure the loss of her mother. Velma was an invaluable, inseparable, and lifetime friend. Arnold was friends with Warren, Velma's brother, and the four of them walked the three miles to the skating rink or the Five and Dime in Holyoke. After a full day of adventure, they had to face the long road home and climb the Chicopee alps known as Soap Shop Hill.

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The fear of war turned the small town of Fairview into an integral part of the war effort when the Mayor of Chicopee succeeded in attracting the government's attention while considering a location for a new Air Force Base. The flat plains of the tobacco fields could be easily converted into landing strips, this sealed the decision, and the construction of Westover Air Force Base began in 1939 spanning the Chicopee and Ludlow communities.

WWII broke out in Europe that year, and by 1941, America entered the war. Local boys whose lockers were to the left and right of Shirley's at Chicopee High School—fought and died in the war. Westover Air Force Base was located adjacent to the Fairview section of Chicopee. There were boys from across the country stationed there; preparing for deployment, training, and attending USO dances. Shirley saw German POW's from the base being transported to work at the fields, factories, and farms filling in for the local boys who were away at war. There were many such camps in the U.S. After the war, many of these soldiers returned choosing to live in the United States.

All the young men went to war. Tucked in letters, Shirley's scrapbook was filled with photographs of soldier's in far away places with faded names and dates on the flip side. These were mostly soldier's she met at the USO dances at home, and friends of her brothers lonely soldiers in foreign countries.

Holyoke's gem, Mountain Park, was a paradise in those days, a trolley brought soldiers and civilians by the hundreds to spend a night dancing in the ballroom to forget their worries, if only for one night. A pavilion that attracted bands, a roller coaster, and a Merry-Go-Round that still exists today, housed in a park downtown Holyoke. Shirley had several beaux stationed far from home, but Velma lost her heart to a local boy, they married and started a family.

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Shirley wasn't meant to be a gym teacher, so she finished her registered nurses training. While in nurse's training with the Sisters of Saint Joseph, Shirley was asked to assist in a home birth. This came about as she was walking back to the nurse's residence. A doctor, seeing her medical bag,

pulled up and invited her along to assist him. It was an experience she never forgot, which was a good thing; because, several months later, she found herself involved in another birth. This time, with no doctor on site. It would have been a comical scene if not for the seriousness of the situation, children running everywhere, opened screen doors while the poor, exhausted woman swatted flies with a newspaper in between contractions. She had to handle the delivery and subsequent lifesaving efforts on the mother who hemorrhaged. After massaging the uterus, ordering the children out of the house, closing the windows, and finding an empty drawer for the newborn, the entire debut performance was acted out and the curtain closed—intermission. The doctor eventually did arrive and laughed at the number of clamps she used to tie off the umbilical cord. With a smile he regarded the limp form practically sharing the bed with the twelfth time mother.

“You saved her life and took command of the situation,” the doc praised.

Spent from the entire spectacle, Shirley only said, “Thanks.”

The number of successful births increased greatly in Shirley’s lifetime, mainly due to the introduction of sulfa drugs, first introduced in Springfield. This miraculous drug fought infection especially in C-sections after labor had started, formerly requiring a call for last rites. Eventually, the cure was readily available in surrounding cities and towns.

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Pa was feeling better, but never fully recovered the loss of his dear wife.

“I should have been kinder and more understanding.” George had many regrets.

Winnie was a loving mother who was genuine, resourceful, and loved reading romance novels.

Her mother, Shirley's Irish grandmother, Margaret Rose Molloy, survived her daughter and husband by many years. My mother described wrapping her arms around her and feeling the cushion of the layers of clothing that surrounded her grandmother; her gaiety, laughter, and Irish jigs around the kitchen. She filled a void in my mother's life. Margaret Rose came to this country sponsored by an older brother and started off as a maidservant in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, before moving to Holyoke to work at one of the mansions on Northampton Street. She met a young man at a Carnival on High Street. George Pecord's family had migrated from Malone, NY. Shirley never knew him, he passed away at forty-six, at the same age his daughter Winifred would pass years later. When Shirley was forty-six the same ailment afflicted her, but she was saved by modern medicine.

Margaret Rose always held a special place in Shirley heart and would for many years to come. I wear her wedding ring, I thought to leave it with my mother when she passed, it meant so much to her, but a very wise nurse at the nursing home suggested I keep it, and wear it to honor them both—nurses are special people.

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Toward the end of the war, Shirley married the most wonderful man. Her father lived with them until he passed in 1955, he heartily agreed with her choice. Thomas Hutch Forrest was a college graduate from Marlboro, Massachusetts who attended seminary school, but came home to help his mother when his father passed away—then the war broke out.

By now, Shirley Helene was a Registered Nurse, and met Tom while on a home visit to a family whose son had Scarlet Fever. The call came into the Chicopee VNA office late in the day, and because of Shirley's good nature, she was asked to take the call, even though it was outside her district—it was the easy solution. Shirley who now used her middle name, professionally, was always willing to help out.

At the home of this young patient, a framed photo of a handsome soldier placed on the piano, caught her eye, and the boy whose health was improving—caught her transitory stares.

"That's my uncle, he'll be here on leave in a couple weeks, and I can introduce you to him."

"I have a boyfriend overseas, David, please don't bother him. It'll be a waste of his time."

One month later that handsome soldier appeared in the marble archway of the Chicopee VNA, with a bouquet of flowers, looking for Shirley. She was highly recommended by his matchmaking nephew, and Tom spotted the golden haired, slender young woman David had so aptly described right down to her navy blue side cap.

"Those flowers should have been for me." That was the visiting nurse whose contrary nature tasked Shirley instead.

A Dear John letter went out to the poor guy in New Guinea. Shirley had three blood tests and several postponed marriage dates due to the war and her ever present, but dormant, TB screens testing positive. Finally, Virgo merged with Cancer, and the marriage happened after traveling to the base camp in Missouri shortly before Tom was to be shipped out.

Gert, whose husband was stationed in California, joined Shirley in Neosho and stood up for her as she exchanged vows with her Signal-Corp soldier, Tom. The next day, the war brides took the train home, both their husbands were now in California and met at the Brown Derby in LA, one day before they were deployed—I saw the photo. Francis went overseas and Tom stayed stateside until the end of the war.

Back at home Shirley and Gert lived at the bungalow with their father.

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After the war, Shirley moved to Marlboro, Massachusetts, Tom Forrest's hometown. He had six brothers and one sister, he was also a favorite uncle to all his nieces and nephews. He would soon settle down and start a family of his own. Gert and her Navy Veteran settled in Holyoke and had two sons.

Bud had married, a beautiful, but fragile woman. Shirley often spoke of Mary who died young, she was lovely and gentle, had curly, blonde hair, and blue eyes with dark lashes. Shirley helped her when both daughters were born, she assisted many births. When Mary's youngest child was two years old, her heart failed, Shirley helped her in her final days. Bud was devastated, but was determined to raise his girls himself.

Arnold never married, but had a longtime girlfriend, Ernestine. I remember them coming to the house in their Sunday best. Arnold was our favorite as well, he never lost that infectious smile and playful nature. Still ever-watchful over Shirley, he spent many hours at our home, telling us what jello was made of, presenting his false teeth, and sharing his spearmint gum—he was dear to all of us cousins.

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Childbirth wasn't easy, Shirley suffered three miscarriages before their first child was born in 1952. Shirley was determined never to give up the dream of having her own child, despite the encouragement of 'well-wishers' to do so. Eleven years later, Tom was the Principal of the elementary school and the proud papa of three children, and in 1958 the family moved back to Fairview and lived in one of the houses built by the McKissick uncles.

Shirley endured eight pregnancies; four live births of whom only three lived to adulthood. Our dear sister, Anne, died when I was seven years old. My parents were stricken with grief, she was a remarkable girl, loving and kind. She doted on our baby sister, Catherine, and had a soft spot for our brother, Tom, who had bundles of nervous energy. She was a comfort to him. Her death was a devastation, especially for him—I remember that day with vivid accuracy. The trip to the emergency room, our distraught parents, the final word from the doctor, and the ride home without her.

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When Catherine started school, my mother went back to work as a visiting nurse with the Holyoke VNA. Because of her technique and gentle way, she was often requested to give injections. Her good nature also garnered her the nickname 'The Big E' because there were enemas to be given and someone had to do it. About her desk, they posted 'Big E' stickers announcing the local state fair. She loved her profession and fell in love with many of her home care patients.

Her career was not free of incidents; she lost the rear axle of her car and had to chase the tires down the hill and found them resting alongside the road, she hit and moved a huge rock off its foundation, and had a gusher of water pass through the floor board of her first car and into her face—all in the call of duty. Toward the end of her career, she took over the Home Health Aide division of the Holyoke VNA and took a desk job. I lived these years and have nothing but fond memories of the working class couple who loved their family unconditionally.

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There were not many men like Thomas Forrest in the world. He was a wonderful husband, loving father, and doting grandfather. My mother was shattered when he left us, and we did our best to comfort her in the following years. She worked as a nurse on the night shift at the Marion House on Northampton Street and quite possibly the same house her grandmother worked as a newly arrived maidservant. Alone on her way to work, she fell in the snow. Not able to get up, she resigned herself to a chilling end. A neighbor's dog, a Rottweiler, came to her rescue giving her warmth and companionship until a fellow worker came by and found her hours later. Always at the service of others she worked until it became impossible.

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Years ago, a woman approached me in the grocery store, she asked if I was Anne Forrest's sister. Stunned, I nodded and she told me that Anne's funeral was the first she ever attended, and she remembered that day and me. So, she approached me in the 'baking needs' aisle. At the time, I was on the brink of a major change in my life. I had received a call from the adoption agency informing me that the birthmother of our first child was asking if we would accept another child

—an unspoken dream of mine. We were so blessed with one how could I ever believe there's be two?

I know it was Anne who inspired this woman to speak to me in the grocery aisle, the forever child in life, our angel in heaven. We welcomed our daughter with open arms into our world, a half-sister to the son we had adopted six years earlier—we named her Anne.

My mother passed away seventeen years ago at 83 years of age, a few days before Thanksgiving, an independent force to the end. Thankful to God for giving us you—We miss you and your story lives on.