

A BIOGRAPHY OF MY MOTHER,
FLORENCE LAVINE SCOGIN FREER

BY LYNN GRANT FREER

My mother was born on July 7, 1908, at Omaha, Nebraska, the second child of Harry Andrew Scogin and Sarah Estelle Lyons Scogin. The Scogins eventually had six children, in the following order:

Orva Sarah	b. 6-27-1907, Bloomington, Ill. d. 2-8-1990, Kansas City, Mo.
Florence Lavine	b. 7-7-1908, Omaha, Ne. d. 10-27-2001, Little Rock, AR
Marian Elizabeth	b. 11-20-1909, Omaha, Ne. d. 4-31-2006
Harry Andrew, Jr. (Bud)	b. 8-6-1911, Omaha, Ne. d. 12-29-84, Jackson, Al.
Clare Margaret	b. 3-2-1914, Omaha, Ne. d. 10-08-78, Falls Church, Va.
Rita Frances	b. 7-18-1915, Omaha, Ne. d. 3/18/2010

Sarah Estelle Lyons Scogin died in 1918 and Harry Andrew Scogin later married Rose Meskill. Harry and Rose had one child, John Richard Scogin, b.10-25-1921, Omaha, Ne.; d. 08-24-1999, Ft. Wayne, In.

At some point between the death of Sarah and Harry's marriage to Rose, the six children were placed in St. James's Orphanage, 3212 No. 60th Street in Omaha. The reason for this was that Harry was a locomotive engineer for Union Pacific RR Co. and had to be on the road much of the time, thus could not properly care for the children. However, after about a month at the orphanage the children returned home, at 1539 South 25th Avenue. Orva assumed the role of "mother" even though she was quite young. My mother, I believe, was "second in command." Quite an experience for young children.

Harry's second wife, Rose, from all accounts I have heard, was a hard taskmistress to the Scogin children and a severe disciplinarian. I have little detail about this, except that the children were required to scrub the kitchen floor before going to school, and that Rose once threw a telephone book at my mother, hitting her in the face. Rose also was reported to have been violent against Harry. Rose and Harry were eventually divorced.

My mother attended school only through the ninth grade, attending Park Grade School (where later I also studied) and Technical High School. After leaving high school, she attended Boyles Business College in Omaha, where she was a top student in shorthand and other secretarial disciplines, graduating on June 12, 1924 at the age of 15. After graduating, she worked for a time at the College as a shorthand instructor.

There is evidence that in July 1926 she was employed at the First Trust Company in Omaha, which company I believe was owned by the First National Bank. She later worked at radio station KOIL-KFAB in Omaha and at affiliated radio stations in Lincoln, NE and Oklahoma City, OK; at Fairmont Creamery in Omaha (later known as Fairmont Foods) and at a Firestone Tire & Rubber Co. store. In 1939 or 1940 she went to work as a secretary in the Loan Department of the First National Bank, retiring in 1973. She later worked as secretary to Nathan Novak of Rosen-Novak Auto Co., dates unknown. In later years, she served as a volunteer at a pro-life thrift shop in Omaha.

During her years at First National Bank, she was very active in the Credit Women's Breakfast Club and attended national conventions in a number of cities in the United States and Bahama Islands. Many of her close friends were also members and had a social circle separate from the club. My mother loved to have card parties with her friends, playing poker, canasta, pinochle, etc. She hated bridge because she thought bridge players were mean-spirited, pig-headed boors (my words). She bowled regularly on a team of women from the bank.

In August 1928 my mother married Lawrence Ellis Freer. I know they loved dancing together, having won a dance contest at Peony Park in Omaha. Lawrence (Larry) could play the ukulele, and I suspect that in their courting days they had lots of fun. In 1929 the stock market crashed and the nation's economy went down the drain; I don't know for certain, but I suspect that because jobs were scarce, Larry was chronically unemployed, leaving the support of the family (by 1934 including me) to my mother. Her secretarial earnings would not come close to making ends meet and this created a great strain on the relationship. They were divorced in 1934, before I was one year old. My father married and divorced again; my mother never re-married. After the divorce, she felt separated from the Church and was non-practicing until the late fifties when she returned to the practice of the Faith.

During the times that my mother worked in Lincoln, NE and Oklahoma City, OK, she left me in the care of relatives in Omaha. She depended mostly on my grandfather Harry A. Scogin and his third wife, Winifred, but my aunts Rita and Clare also had a share in this. My mother hated being away from family; and I think this had an effect upon her approach to her job.

By 1938 she had returned to Omaha and rented a room in a house near Park Avenue and Leavenworth Streets. I remember catching the measles while living there; also, I got into a scrap with another boy and bit his ear. Our next dwelling was in an

apartment on 29th Street about three blocks south of Leavenworth Street; I remember being "skewered" by a pointed stick being carried by a neighbor boy walking ahead of me, and running home with this stick protruding from my abdomen -- turned out to be no big deal. Then we lived in an apartment in a four-plex at 31st and Davenport Streets in Omaha, along with my mother's friend Luana; Mom engaged a young woman named Marvel Kelly as a sort of "nanny" for me. I remember playing with Donna, who lived in the same building, and someone in an upstairs apartment dumped a dishpan of water on us - accidentally. In September 1939, we were invited to take up residence with my grandparents at 1539 South 25th Avenue, the house where my mother and all her siblings had been raised. I believe that this was the economic salvation of our little family, as the rent was very reasonable and the environment fairly stable.

Our life with Harry and Winnie was not without problems, however. My mother and Winnie were not particularly compatible, and they were at odds much of the time. As a child, I was not much aware of this, but looking back I can see it quite well. I believe that part of the problem was that Winnie at times regarded me as her own. One can imagine my mother's reaction to this. I am sure there were other factors as well. In spite of the problems, my mother continued to live with them until 1967, when she abruptly moved into an apartment near 31st and Dodge Streets with her friend Helen Brown and another lady. I had married in 1967 and the next year my wife Rita and I had purchased a house at 1040 No. 77th Street. One day in 1969 my mother was with us as we drove through the area, and she spotted an "open house" at 7563 Charles Street, about three blocks from our residence. We went in to take a look at the house, and before I knew it, mother was signing papers to buy it! For the first time in her life, she was about to become fully independent.

Shortly after moving into her house, she rented a room to Josephine Ryan, a teacher at St. Margaret Mary's School. Josephine was from Falls City, NE and considered my mother as a surrogate mother to her. She continued to rent from my mother until about 1985. Josephine was not very good at domestic chores; for instance, she once tried to heat a pizza in the oven, and put it in upside down. Mom did all the cooking after that. Mom also left little notes for Josephine -- my favorite was the note near the flush handle on the toilet: "jiggle me."

One interesting event that happened while she lived on Charles Street was that she decided to sell her 1967 Chevrolet Malibu and get a newer model. At the time, I was living in Cheyenne, WY; I asked her if she would like for me to shop around for a car for her, to which she agreed. I spotted a nice-looking 1976 Malibu sedan at a dealership in Cheyenne and she agreed to buy it. As I was scheduled for a meeting in Omaha, I drove the Malibu to deliver it to her. On the way, I noticed that the car was consuming oil at an alarming rate; I checked the oil often along the way, adding as needed. Upon arriving at Omaha, I informed Mom about the problem and suggested she take it to a Chevrolet dealer to see what was wrong. Well, the dealer eventually dismantled the engine and found that, although the mileage on the car was not great, it apparently had received no maintenance at all and the engine was unrepairable. After much haggling with the dealer

in Cheyenne, it was agreed that they would pay half the cost of replacing the engine. My mother was quite satisfied with the deal, because for relatively little extra cost, she had a brand-new engine in her car. The car later was sold to LouAnne and Bob Staeheli; LouAnne is my mother's niece.

Another event, this one quite unsettling, was that two women accused my mother of hitting their car as they drove south on 72nd Street at Western Avenue. They pursued Mom until she was able to pull into the parking lot of the First National Bank branch at 78th and Cass Streets, where an off-duty policeman was working for the bank. He was able to keep the women under control and collect the details of the alleged collision. A claim was filed against my mother's insurance, and as my mother denied that there had been a collision, they requested that she bring her car to them for inspection to see if damages could be identified. There were none, and later the husband of one of the women called the insurance company to report that the whole thing was phony; his wife and the other woman had tried this scam before. My mother was, understandably, quite shaken by this ordeal, and I believe it contributed to the decline in her health which became evident some time later.

My mother was well known for her sense of humor; her artistic bent - she loved making figures from pipe cleaners, beads and cardboard, and also for a while made life-sized stuffed dolls which were much in demand by her friends and family; and she always loved being around young children. She served on the money-counting committee and was active in the prayer line in her parish in Omaha. She did extensive genealogy work on her father's and mother's sides of the family.

In 1993, she began to show signs of confusion and paranoia, and was eventually diagnosed at the University of Nebraska Medical Center as having Alzheimer's Disease. As a result, I had to put her into a nursing home, first at Florence Home in Omaha, then at Pleasant Valley Living Center in Little Rock, and subsequently at Health Care Center at Good Shepherd in Little Rock, where she stayed until her death on October 27, 2001.