Remembering Aunt Marie

by Thomas F. Coleman

After one year of research into the ancestors of my parents, there were still a few gaps in the family tree. One of them was in the Steil family.

My mother, Kathleen Steil, was an only child. But each of her parents had several siblings. So she had many aunts and uncles.

Her father, Frank Steil, had seven siblings. I was able to gather a considerable amount of information about many of them. But there was mostly a void when it came to the descendants of Frank's youngest sibling, Marie Steil.



Fortunately, I had a little bit of firsthand information to build upon. I had met Aunt Marie on a few occasions. Although she and her family lived in Connecticut, she had returned to Michigan to visit sporadically, mostly for funerals and an occasional Steil reunion. However, I don't recall her husband, Bradley Walker, or her children ever coming with her for these events.

My childhood memory of Aunt Marie was that she was a pretty woman with an attractive hairstyle who dressed very nice. Her demeanor was warm and inviting.



I was finally able to meet Uncle Bradley when I was 16 years old. I went to New York for the World's Fair in 1964. Since I was so close to Connecticut, I made it a point to take a train ride to Stamford where they lived in a stately old mansion. She drove a 1956 Thunderbird with a removable hardtop. It was turquoise with a white interior.

I remember that Uncle Bradley was an executive with an advertising firm on Madison Avenue. I think one of his big accounts was Eastern Airlines.

I did not see Uncle Bradley and Aunt Marie again until I was 24 years old. I was living in Los Angeles. My parents came to California for a visit that year and while they were here we drove to Palm Desert to see Aunt Marie and Uncle Bradley. They had a winter home in Palm Desert.

I never saw either of them again. But my thoughts turned to them when I started working on family genealogy in 2010.

In April 2011, during my Family History Tour, I was given a document from cousin Ken Steil. I took it home but did not really examine it closely until a few months later. Then I realized that the document contained the name and phone number of a daughter of Anna Steil, an older sister of my Grandpa Frank.

I took a chance and called Barbara Ladensack and her husband Ralph Werling. I asked if they had contact information for anyone in Marie Steil's family. They did. As a result, I was put in touch with Marie and Bradley's son Tom and his wife Audrey.

Audrey gave me information about Tom's branch of the family. She also gave me contact information for people who could fill me in about Marie and Bradley's two other children – John and Sally – and their descendants.

What started out as a bare bones family tree of Bradley and Marie and their three children, now has grown to a list of 15 people, including grandchildren and great grandchildren. And there is more information to yet come.

Someday I would like to pay a visit to Connecticut or New York where most of the Walkers live. I could interview some of the older members of this branch of the Steil family about their memories of their matriarch, Marie Steil, and her husband Bradley Walker.

I am sure there are interesting stories to be told and I would like to add the these memories to the family archives. ◊◊◊

(Top photo: Siblings Anna Ladensack, Frank Steil, Marie Walker, and Bill Steil at a family reunion in Michigan. Bottom Photo: Kay and Murray Coleman with Bradley and Marie Walker in Palm Desert.)