

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 6, 2008

Joyce L. Nickerson (1933–): Joyce came to live on the third floor at Auburn Heights in 1965 and learned to help my mother with housework. This turned out to be her residence for 43 years. A native of the Odessa area, she had lived with and cared for an elderly uncle there until his death. Another Odessa resident, James T. Shallcross Jr. (1879–1972), my mother's eldest brother, knew my mother was looking for help to take care of her big house and wondered if Joyce might fit in. With great trepidation, she took the job on a trial basis.

My mother was not easy to work for, often expecting her helpers to do things exactly as she did them, which was usually impossible. At the age of 80, she was still in good health, however, and taught Joyce many things, including some of the idiosyncrasies of Auburn Heights. Joyce had never driven a car, but the Short Line Bus was still running past our driveway, and it was suggested that she could ride the bus to Wilmington and then to Odessa on her days off. She tried this, but the schedules were such that it was not very practical, and her relatives often transported her. It was not long before she learned to drive and purchased her first car. In the 40-plus years since then, she has owned about five cars, and although they were used only two days per week, she has driven about 300,000 miles, with only one very minor accident.

At first, my mother wanted her here on Sunday some of the time to help with Sunday dinners, when guests might be invited, so she was off on Monday and Thursday. After my mother came down with shingles on her face and behind her eyes in 1966, from which she never recovered, there was little entertaining, and Joyce was off on Thursday and Sunday. This worked out well as she enjoyed attending the Methodist Church in Odessa, after which she would have dinner with her sister Hilda and leave there at precisely the same time each Sunday night to drive to Yorklyn.

My father died in 1969, and Joyce helped during my mother's long illness, did the washing and house cleaning, and a limited amount of cooking. In the early '70s, she went with Mary Glenn and my mother to Rehoboth for a few weeks each summer. When my mother died in 1979, she felt an obligation to take care of me, and she did her best to please my many whims. When Ruth and I were married in 1985, she felt she was no longer needed and prepared to move out. I suggested that she might be of help to us, so she consented to try it. A few years after the third floor was remodeled with its new kitchen in 1988, Joyce began to use this kitchen and took her meals alone in her private apartment. Around the house we could count on the waste baskets being emptied and my bed made daily. Monday was "vacuuming" day, Tuesday was the main wash day, Wednesday she cleaned bathrooms, Thursday was her day off, and Friday she changed bed linens, washed again and ironed. This schedule never changed. A very generous person, she bestowed gifts on many relatives and friends on their birthdays and at Christmas time.