



GRANDMA and 8 chidren in the.

ROSE ARBOR. It was the .

entrance to the ROSE GARDEN.

GRANDDAD TOOK the picture.

INTRODUCTION

When starting to plan for the 2003 reunion, my thoughts kept returning to Granddad and Grandma Sirney. I have so many very fond, loving memories of these two people, and I treasure all of them. It's too bad, I thought, that my younger cousins know so little about them. If only there was some way we could help them "know" John and Olga Sirney better.

That's when the idea of written "history" popped up, and why I asked many of you to contribute your recollections and anecdotes of either growing up as one of the 10 Sirney children or participating as a member of the greater Sirney clan. I'm very thankful to everyone who contributed photographs, papers, pictures, and memories.

To keep identification as simple as possible, Granddad and Grandma are referred to as John and Olga, and I've dropped "aunt" and "uncle" and "mother" when referring to their children.

Today in 2003, 90 years after John and Olga married, there are over 190 family members. I hope you enjoy your family story.

Peggy Simmons

Special thanks to:

Everyone who wrote their memories.

Debbie Marxen, who started interviewing 10 yrs. ago.

Uncle Bob, for all the details about the house as well as many pictures.

My Mother, for patiently being my "fact-checker".

My husband, Tim, who encouraged me a lot, as well as edited the story.

THE "SIRNEY" STORY

The Sirney Family "mystery" has always been—In what European country were John's parents born? There were many discussions as I was growing up concerning his being an orphan and not actually knowing his background. I'm told that he never talked about it much as he was raising his own family. He would have been much too busy with more important, current concerns. As he got older and was living on the Hawkins farm, Millie would tell us to listen carefully to his stories since elderly people frequently develop clear recall about their earliest years. John loved to tell stories about his life, but never told much even then about his earliest years. Various family members have researched census records, genealogy records, cemeteries around Pittsburgh, and written letters to follow various leads. The story that I am going to relate is the most complete one that I know. Millie and Lois compiled most of it from all the research several years ago.

Sirney—the name doesn't even give any clues. It seems that no one else spells his or her surname that way in Europe so it doesn't lead to a European country. We now believe that a grade school teacher changed the spelling from Sirnie or Sarne when he was about 10 or 12. The 1900 census shows a John Sarne from Austria. He was 35, and had lived in the U.S. for 11 years. He could not read, write, or speak English, and he worked as a coke drawer in Westmoreland County in P.A. The census also lists a wife named Mary and 4 children—John, Mary, Paul, and Annie. These were the names of his family members so perhaps this was his family. Ten years later however, the 1910 census shows no record of a Sarne family. Recently 2 families named Sirney have been located. Both families feel that their names were changed from Sirny by customs. One family came from Czechoslovakia around 1908, and the other immigrated to Canada in 1929 from a small town outside of Vienna, close to the Czech border. We'll probably never know John's European origins.

The census data of 1900 referred to above is:

Sarne, John	age 35	Austria	11 years in US alien
			Could not read, write, or speak English
			Westmoreland County, PA
			Profession –coke drawer
Wife, Mary	age 35	Austria	9 years In US
Son, John	age 12	Austria	9 years in US
Daughter, Mary	age 7	PA	
Son, Paul	age 5	PA	
Daughter, Annie	age 7mos. PA		

In the 1910 census there is no record of a Sarne, Sirney, or Sirnie family.

The "story" seems to center around small towns in PA south of Pittsburgh. His father was John Sirnie (or Sarne) and his mother was Maria Urban (probably from Austria). He was the oldest and his siblings were Mary, Annie, and Paul. He lived in Whitney, PA and remembers moving in deep snow to Mammoth, PA. Both towns are in southwest PA. When he was about 10-12 years old, his mother left with the 3 other children and it is assumed that she went back to the "old country". He stayed with his father (perhaps chose to stay) and they boarded with a sister of his mother's named Ann Simon (Seman). He helped his father at work until his father left him and he continued to live with his uncle and Aunt Ann. This was all at about the age of 12 and the year 1900.

After his father left, he was working in the Henry Clay Frick coke mines in Mammoth. He handled the donkeys that drew the carts that took ashes from the coke ovens. He was injured while working there. Then his uncle and Aunt Ann left Mammoth because of work layoffs. Priests have said that there were many abandoned children at this time because the mine shut down. The Catholics established orphanages at this time to deal with this. I remember John talking about living in a Catholic orphanage and being an altar boy. Records show that he was confirmed in Mammoth in the Catholic Church.

A man named Sterling was his superintendent at the coke mines. He went at some point to live in Sterling's barn. He then was promoted to driving a coal wagon. He also worked around this time for a private coke company at Udell about 3 miles from Mammoth.

I'm not clear if he was still attending school in Mammoth. He remembered a teacher named Miss Carpenter. She arranged at sometime for him to take summer classes in Kecksburg about 1 mile from Mammoth. He had the nickname of "Sirloin" in school. By this time his last name was spelled Sirney. Miss Carpenter had a stamp made up with his name, Sirney, on it. She was probably the one who changed the spelling.

At the age of 14, John left Mammoth, and was on his own and supporting himself. He had heard that his father was working in East Pittsburgh at Westinghouse Air Brake. He went there to try to find him. Jack says, "There were three shifts each day and several entrances to the plant. Dad said that he worked the entrances and exits for each shift for about a week, but never found his dad." The company was hiring drill press operators, so John applied. He was hired but given a wheelbarrow, broom, and shovel. Sometime between the ages of 14 and 16, John also worked on passenger trains sorting mail. Then around the age of 16, he got a job at Pittsburgh Locomotive Works. There he worked in the chipping dept. using an air-powered chisel on molds for fireboxes.

One of John's first friends that he met after he was on his own was a man named Creedie. Creedie was the foreman of the crew John was assigned to. Jack says, "At lunchtime Creedie noticed John was not eating any lunch. John didn't have any because he didn't have any money and also no place to stay. Creedie called him over and asked him where his lunch was. John said that he wasn't hungry. Creedie insisted that he had an extra sandwich and John ate it. At quitting time Creedie took John home and kept him there until John got his first paycheck. Then Creedie took him to the YMCA and got him a

room." For years John would travel to Ohio to visit Creedie and his wife. John and Creedie remained friends until Creedie's death.

John met Olga when she was 16 years old and he was 18 years old. John worked with Walter and Eric Kuschel at Pittsburgh Locomotive. The brothers took John home for dinner and to introduce him to their younger sister, Olga. John and Olga married 7 years later.

Jack tells another interesting story from this period in John's life: "Walter Chrysler was an engineer at Pittsburgh Locomotive Works. When Chrysler left the plant to go to Detroit, he asked John to go with him. John was really interested in Olga Kuschel." He decided to stay in Pittsburgh.

THE KUSCHEL FAMILY

The Kuschel family history has been much easier to research than the Sirney family. Olga Kuschel was born on October 11, 1889 in Zanow (Canow), Germany. The town is located about ten miles from the Baltic Sea and it is northeast of Berlin. A current atlas shows a town in that location is now spelled Sianow and it is now in Poland.

Olga's father was Gottlieb Kuschel from Pomerania, a Prussian province in northern Germany about 60 miles northeast of Berlin. In 1815 all of Pomerania came under Prussian control. Gottlieb had been in the army. He earned a German Iron Cross medal for his service in the Franco-Prussian War. When Bismarck became the Prime Minister of Germany, he purged all Prussian officers from the German army because he thought they represented a political threat to his position. Gottlieb then became a school teacher at the church. There were living quarters in the back of the building for the Kuschel family.

Johanna Karolina Wendt married Gottlieb. They had 6 children while still living in Germany—Annie, Fred, Walter, Erich, Clara, and Olga. When Olga was only 2 years old, Gottlieb left Germany and went to Bay City, Michigan through Baltimore in 1891. He was sponsored for immigration by Julius Wendt who was Johanna's brother. Julius was living in Bay City. A church in Pittsburgh, Pa advertised in a German newspaper for a teacher. Gottlieb got the position. He saved his money and sent for Annie and Fred eight years later. The next year, 1900, he sent for Johanna and the remaining children—Clara, Erich, Walter and Olga. Olga was 10 or 11 years old. The whole family settled in Pittsburgh. No one seems to know how Johanna survived and raised 6 children while Gottlieb was establishing himself in America.

Olga spoke no English when she came to the U.S. Yet less than 8 years later she graduated from high school. She then worked as a seamstress in a factory along the Allegheny River where suits were made.

Actually the first reunions in this family were the Kuschel reunions. Held every year for 1 day at North Park, Pa., they were our main contact with the extended Kuschel family. A shelter at North Park was reserved at the beginning of the summer season. Everyone brought food. Fred, Erich and Walter were there. Even though it was a hot summer day they would always be wearing suits and a hat. Their wives were already deceased and the three men were always together. Fred (Fritz) would play the concertina, which is a small hand-held accordian with bellows and keys. Olga and John came. It was the early 50's and most of the Sirney and Kuschel children were parents themselves. Any family that was still living in PA would also come to this 1- day event.

For the kids it was our annual visit with our second cousins. We always played a game of looking for the pennies hidden in the sawdust. The one with the most pennies would win a prize. The biggest treat of the day was "ice balls". They were magical and delicious.

A metal ice shaver was scraped across a large block of ice to make shaved ice balls. All the kids could each pick their favorite syrup to pour over this amazing treat. Art Tritsch was always the one who controlled this and he would call out "Ice-a-balls" as he worked his magic. For years I looked for an ice shaver to recreate this wonderful dessert for my kids, but I never found one. I'm sure it wouldn't be the same because Art wouldn't be saying "ICE-A-BALLS".

MARRIED LIFE

John Sirney and Olga Kuschel eloped to Cleveland, Ohio and married on Sept. 8, 1913 at the Grace Lutheran Church there. He was 25 years old and she was 2 years younger. Her brother, Erich had married Freeda just 3 days earlier. Olga had been a bridesmaid. So they must have eloped immediately after the wedding.

They had known each other since she was 16. She was working as a seamstress and he was already working for Ford Motor Co. John was assistant superintendent for production at the Ford plant in the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh.

During the first 13 years of marriage, Olga and John moved several times. They were usually on the Northside of Pittsburgh. At the time of the 1920 census the Sirney household included 2 boys, Jack (Oct. 1915) and Howard (Feb. 1918) as well as Johanna and Clara Kuschel. Johanna was Olga's mother who was 71 years old and recently widowed. Clara was Olga's sister. She was older but had never married, and had a slight handicap of an arm paralyzed from polio. Clara lived with them throughout her life. Olga was also pregnant with Millie in 1920.

Around 1920 right after Millie was born, John got a job with the Ford Dealer in Butler as the Service Manager. The family moved to New Castle Street in Butler. Lois was born there and baptized in St Marks in Butler. By 1925 they were back in Pittsburgh and living on Millerton Ave. near Olga's brother, Walter and his wife Katie. Johanna was living upstairs and Millie remembers running upstairs to be comforted by "Mutton" when her Mother was angry with her.

John had always wanted to live in "the country". Sunday drives frequently were to the country to look at houses or at pieces of property on country roads. Now around 1925 John was working for the Lincoln division of Ford Motor Co. and driving a Lincoln. It was the '20s and times were relatively prosperous.

John and Olga became the proud owners of 16 acres in Gibsonia, PA, 15 miles north of Pittsburgh in 1926. They rented what everyone called "the farmhouse" on Richland Road. It overlooked their new property and they lived there until they built their new house. By now the family included 3 boys and 3 girls. Bette was born in the city on Millerton Ave. and Bob (#6 and the largest of the babies at birth) was born there shortly before they moved.

The new property had a wonderful spring. It was decided that the new house must be located near that spring. So work began on the house on Ben Miller Rd. and the family moved in about 1 year later.

THE HOUSE

John was 39 years old when he moved the family to the country. Immediately he started building a house for his family on the 16 acres of fields they'd purchased. He decided to locate the house up the hill from a plentiful spring near Ben Miller Road. The property was across the road from the farmhouse they'd rented. Although the building site was on the west end of the property, you could see it from the farmhouse. None of the trees and shrubs were there at that time.

I've asked his children how it was that John knew how to build a house. He didn't have a father to teach him building skills. Bette said, "He was just naturally very smart." Bob said that he bought many books on all related subjects—building and gardening. Some of those books are still at the house today. John also had attended Carnegie Tech College for a year to study drafting. So from his accumulated knowledge, he built the family's house. He was, of course, working full time, so most of the work would've been done on nights and week-ends.

The original house was built on a 3ft. foundation. There were 4 rooms downstairs—living room, dining room, kitchen and 1 bedroom. Upstairs were 2 bedrooms—1 for the boys and 1 for the girls. The outside of the house was covered in tarpaper, and there was no insulation at that time.

Guy Meyers, the neighbor next door, thought John should have a basement in the house. So the house was raised 3ft, and a cellar was dug.

Heating the house turned out to be relatively easy, thanks to Guy Meyers. He had several oil wells on his property next door. A by-product of an oil well is natural gas. So a pipe was run from the gas of one of the wells to the new house. Small gas stoves were placed in every room for heat. The gas was also used for cooking, and there were gaslights as well. A meter was installed in the basement on the gas line, but Guy seldom asked for payment.

Within a couple of years, John ran a copper water line from the spring, so the house would have running water. Even today the water for the house still comes from the spring.

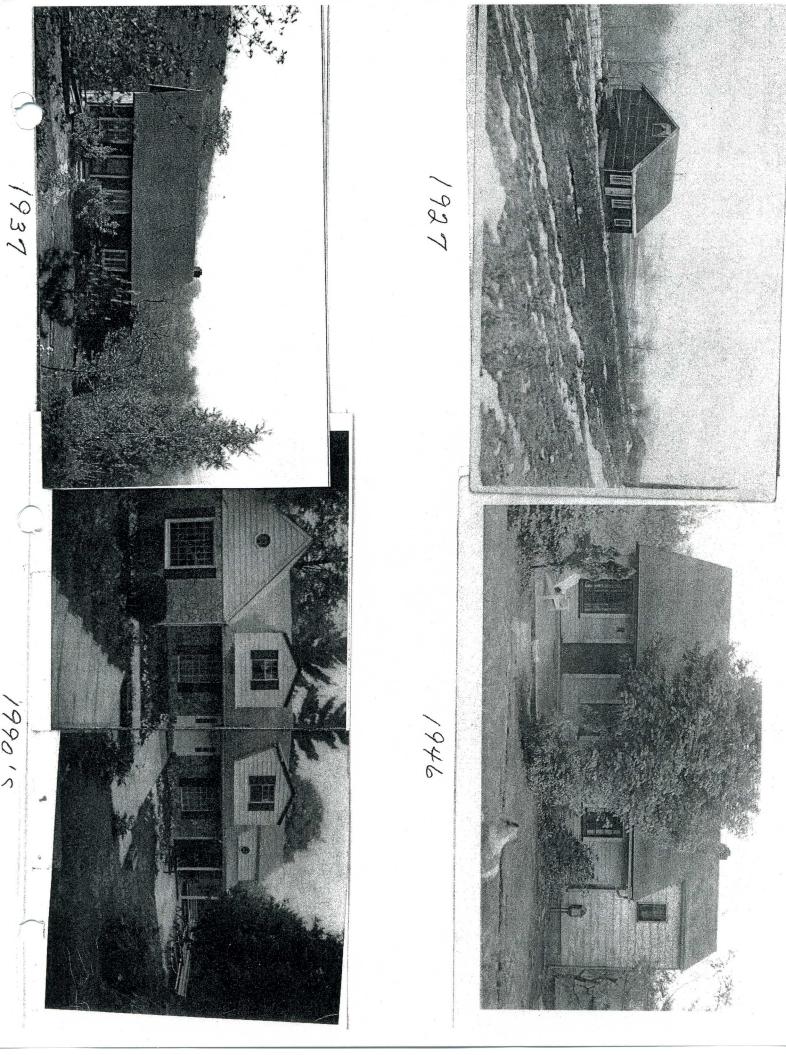
Electricity came in the early 30's. A homeowner had to pay for every pole to bring electricity to his house. John paid a lot of money for the poles, line, and labor, and then he paid a flat rate every month. Jack says, "There was no way we could use enough power to equal that monthly charge, but Dad tried." There were even lighted picnic areas in front of and behind the house.

A garage was soon built on Ben Miller Rd. for the Lincoln. A barn was also constructed behind the house for Ben, the pony, and later for Bess, the cow.

The house didn't change much during the Great Depression, but in the early 40's, John started building again. The back porch was removed and a 2story addition was built on the side of the house. The rear portion of the roof was raised on the original house. The house was sided and painted white. Inside, a kitchen was put in the new section and the old kitchen became a bedroom. The staircase was moved from the living room to the kitchen addition. On the 2nd floor a new bedroom and bathroom was added. The only bathroom had been on the 1st floor. Bob remembers coming home during the 40's on furlough from the Air Force. "Dad said, 'Bob, I'm glad you're home. I need your help removing the old roof shingles, the boards, and the rafters.' Dad was glad for the help. I was glad to get back to the Air Force."

The house was originally built in a field. Someone helped John design a landscape plan. John planted all the trees and shrubs around the house as well as the rose garden for Olga. He'd borrow a truck for the weekend from Lincoln, where he was working. Then he'd go with the boys to the woods to dig rhododendrons and other plants to put on the property. Eventually he'd planted hundreds of plants and trees in the once empty field.

In 1961 Bob and Ruth bought the house and 10 acres from John. John continued to live there with Bob and his family. Bob initially reinforced the roof of the garage so that the roof could be used as a deck. Soon he added a stone façade and 2 front dormers to the 2nd floor. Finally a major remodeling was undertaken. The present house has a large 2story living room over the garage, a large modern kitchen, and a family room where there was once a downstairs bedroom. It's a beautiful home that has evolved from humble beginnings almost 80 years ago.





GROWING UP

Life on Ben Miller Road was filled with lots of hard work and lots of good times for the growing Sirney family. Living on a "farm" meant you could be almost self-sufficient. A cow was kept for the milk. Chickens were in a small building in back, halfway down the hill. There was also a grape arbor, and there was always a large garden. If you went through the path in the woods toward Richland Rd. you'd find the orchard. There were rows of sour cherry trees as well as apples and peach trees. Ducks, rabbits, dogs, and many cats were always around.

Mealtimes were very important and special, especially the evening meal. Everyone got "cleaned up for dinner" before John came home. Before sitting down, he would go around the table and kiss each child "hello" and call them by their pet name. Having just come home from work, John was still wearing a white shirt and tie. Olga removed her apron and took her place at the table across from John. By 1935, when Richard was the baby, there were 13 people around the table every night—John, Olga, Clara, and the 10 children. Bette said that table manners were stressed at the meals. Everyone had to say, "May I be excused?" before they left the table. Olga and Clara did the cooking. On Sunday there was always a big dinner consisting of either roast beef or chicken. After dinner the children cleared the table and washed the dishes, while John and Olga talked in the living room.

Not all meals were in the dining room. In the summer, Millie remembers many picnics in the woods above the driveway or behind the house. John had wired both locations with lights and placed picnic tables there, so if the weather was good, the food was carried outside.

Like all big families the Sirney children had many chores to do. Chores started with the oldest children and were passed down as everyone got older. Jack remembers that he and Howard did the dishes every night and kept looking at Millie and Lois to grow up quickly and take over. Millie says that when kitchen duty passed to them, Lois always washed and the girls would all sing as they washed and dried. Jeanne remembers that "the best part was when we all harmonized the good old songs like 'I've been working on the railroad' or whatever would come to mind. Later we were called "The Lemon Sisters."

Saturday was cleaning day. The linoleum floors throughout the house were washed and covered with paste wax. Then all the children sat on rags and "scooted" around on the floor to polish it; or they put on old wool socks and "skated" the floors to make them shine.

The boys were responsible for the farm work. Bess, the cow, supplied the family milk. Jack, being the oldest, was naturally given the milking job at an early age. Bob remembers the day he learned to milk the cow. Jack was a teenager, going to high school in Pittsburgh, involved in school activities, and hadn't come home from school. Olga

took Bob to the barn to milk Bess, but neither one knew how to do it. The neighbor, Mrs. Meyers, came over to show them the technique. It was Bob's job from that day on. After Bob left for the service, the milking job was shared by Charlotte, Richard and their father.

Rich has vivid memories of Bess. "Although milking was a task, the biggest problem was old Bess herself. You see, Bess had a curled horn that turned a complete circle back and touched her head. Now, Bess liked to rub her head on the barbed wire fence and in the process the fence would snap under that horn. Now she was trapped. YEAH, RIGHT!?? Bess would just back up until the fence broke. Now after two or three times of doing this, good ol' Bess would just step over what was left of the fence and walk to the Meyers. They had the best tasting corn in the neighborhood. Of course she only did this during the day when Mom and Clara were alone at home. I remember several occasions being called our of class in the George Washington Consolidated School (3 1/2 miles from home) and told to go home because the cow is in the neighbor's corn. Do you know how much corn a cow can knock down while wondering unchecked through a cornfield for a couple of hours? Believe me, LOTS! John soon tired of all the hassle and expense of paying Guy Meyers for the destroyed corn and shipped her off to a dairy farm."

The large vegetable garden was an absolute necessity for the family. It seemed that every type of vegetable that can be grown in Pennsylvania was grown. The garden involved the whole family. From plowing and cultivating and planting in the spring to harvesting and canning and preserving in the late summer, every Sirney child remembers the big garden and orchard. The family moved to the country in 1926 and the Depression came in the 30's, so all the food they produced sustained them through that very rough time. They always had enough food to eat; although Millie says "she and Lois couldn't eat green beans for years" because they'd had them so often in as many different ways as possible. Jeanne reluctantly remembers all those tomatoes, or more precisely those "awful, big green caterpillars on tomato plants. Bob and I were given a can with gasoline and sent out to pick caterpillars from the plants. We were given pliers to pull them off the vine and drop them in the can. Enough of that!" During the Depression all the city relatives also benefited, since they came to the Sirneys and took baskets of produce home.

Canning and preserving was a long, involved process. There were no pressure canners or freezers in the 30's and early 40's. Green beans, for example, were picked by the bushel. The children played word games as they snapped the beans. Olga and Clara were on their feet all day while "jarring" and "processing" the vegetable of the day. Besides the fruits and vegetables that were grown on the farm, wild berries were also picked. Huckleberries and raspberries were picked for pies and preserves.

Sometimes in addition to the regular chores, Millie recalls that they had to help the Meyers. Once on a hot day Millie and Lois were sent to pick raspberries for Mrs. Meyers. "We were hoping for a nickel or dime as pay because we wanted to send for a sample of nail polish advertised in a magazine. We planned to keep it a secret from Dad; he was very strict and nail polish was verboten. We were about 10 and 12 years old. Instead, our pay was a quart of berries to take home to Mother."

There were always chickens and they kept the family supplied with eggs. Rich remembers that "if they did not co-operate with the egg supply, they made a good Sunday meal." When he was about 9 or 10 years old, he "was given the task of supplying the beheaded creature for the main course. The only amusement in that process was watching the chicken flop around the yard after she lost her head."

One of the first pets John got for the children was Ned, the pony. All the older children remember Ned very fondly. He would pull a small cart that would hold about 3 children. Sometimes they'd ride to the 2-room schoolhouse in the cart. Jack and Howard used Ned to help them deliver newspapers. Millie recalls that they'd let her come along. Then they'd tell her to take the paper to the neighbor's house. That neighbor had a goose that chased her; her brothers thought that was very funny. Millie also tells of another adventure with Ned. "We'd take Ned and the cart to the top of a hill. He'd start running down the hill—faster and faster. At the bottom the road turned sharply and we'd round the bend. The cart would be on 2 wheels. We thought that was great fun. We never told Mother about that."

Whenever they could in the summer, the kids went swimming in Hardie's Lake. Jack, being the oldest, would be in charge of the group. The lake is 2 miles away by car, but it never seemed far when you "cut through the fields" to get there. It was actually owned by the railroad. The steam locomotives would stop there to refill their boilers. It's still there, next to the railroad tracks and Gibson Rd., near the bridge that crosses the creek. In the winter it was also the best place to ice skate. All the kids spent many happy hours there.

Once there was almost a disaster at the lake. Howard wanted to see what would happen to a penny if a train ran over it. He placed the penny on the tracks, and the children waited on the bank while a long train passed. He then ran across the tracks to retrieve his penny. What he didn't hear or see was another train coming on the other tracks from the opposite direction. Millie says, "he flew back to the bank just before the train passed. His guardian angel was watching him that day. We didn't tell Mother."

Life in this large family has spawned many amusing stories. Millie and Lois remembered what happened when they'd bring dates home. The younger kids would sit on all the chairs in the living room and giggle at the "guys". The two girls resolved to do the same thing to their younger brothers and sisters when they started dating. Rich also recalls his sisters bringing dates home. "That was fun. We would run to the windows and stare out. Most of the time it was dark and we couldn't see anything. When they got in the house, we generally were chased into the back bedroom or kitchen; but there was only a curtain in the doorway between the living room and hallway. We would then hang around the curtain and continually peek through until chased. I know we made life miserable for our older brothers and sisters (mostly sisters) but isn't that what younger brothers and sisters are for?"

Sometimes more serious incidents occurred. John, Jack, Howard, and Bob had gathered hay for feeding the cow during the winter months. It had been raked into a large pile behind the house (not baled as farmers do now) and covered with a tarp. Jeanne, who was about 6 years old, and Charlotte, who as 4, climbed to the top of the pile. They were playing with matches. As Jeanne says, "You can imagine what happened. I almost burned down Gibsonia. Dad thought Bob did it and sent him into the house to receive the worst whipping you can imagine. I stood outside looking up at the bedroom window, saying in a very weak voice, 'But I did it'." Neighbors came to help put out the fire. Years later during a big Thanksgiving dinner, the truth came out and everyone had a good laugh.

Attending school in the country was much different than in Pittsburgh. Jack, Howard, Millie, Lois, and Betty walked a mile to the 2- room country schoolhouse. There were 4 grades on the 1st floor and 4 grades upstairs. This was very progressive since most country schools had all grades in 1 room. Millie remembers, "the winters being so cold and I fantasized about having a pathway to school lined with pot-bellied stoves". Eventually a new consolidated school was built. Millie attended 7th and 8th grade there and rode a school bus.

High school meant traveling to Etna High School, in Pittsburgh, for Jack, Howard, and Millie. They rode with their father when he went to work and waited until he finished to go home. When Lois reached high school age, she was able to attend Mars High School, which was much closer to home.

Vacations were usually at Lake Erie—about 80 miles north of Gibsonia. The family rented a cabin for a week or two, usually at Lake Forest Beach near Geneva. They packed all the luggage onto the back of the Lincoln and piled into the big car. Sometimes John returned to Gibsonia and to work, while Olga stayed at the lake with the kids.

Olga was an excellent seamstress, a welcome skill for a large family. During the depression everything was saved. The feed bags were kept, washed to remove the print, and sewed into aprons, curtains, dresses, and kitchen towels. During more prosperous times, Olga took the trolley, the Harmony Short Line, to Pittsburgh to shop for fabric and other necessities. The trolley had its own tracks for its 20 mile trip to Pitts. and it passed about a mile from their home. Olga also was a wiz at crocheting and knitting. She always had a knitting or crocheting project that she usually worked on after dinner. Her needles clicked furiously, and she never seemed to look at her work as it took shape. Olga said she was born with knitting needles in her hands. She also played the piano and was active in the Garden Club.

From the time that John and Olga were married in 1913 until the early '40s and WWII, John always had jobs that involved the automobile industry—usually the Ford Motor Co. The jobs were usually in Pittsburgh, but for 4 years in the early '20s the family lived in Butler, while John was service manager for the Ford dealer there. In the '20s when times were good, John drove a Lincoln with jump seats to accommodate the growing family. When the family was going somewhere and the children would ask about where they

were going, Rich remembers "Dad would say 'Just follow the dog'. The hood ornament on the Lincoln was a dog on his hind legs with his front legs stretched forward, as if to be running very fast."

Howard reminisces that John, as part of his job, would sometimes pick up a specially – ordered car for a customer. Sometimes he took overnight sleeper trains to "faraway" destinations, such as Detroit or Buffalo, to pick up a car. Occasionally, Jack or Howard would accompany him on the trips. These special-order cars could be quite something. Howard still remembers one beauty from Buffalo. It was painted robin's egg blue with a matching interior. Inside was lavish, with leather seats, a lap robe for the back seat, and cut-glass vases for fresh flowers! Howard even recalls the cost of the car—\$10,000—quite a sum in those days.

During the depression, the automobile industry suffered badly and John had to look elsewhere for work. John eventually got a job as chauffeur for 2 wealthy Pittsburghers-Hedi Heinz (of the Heinz ketchup family) and Mrs. Grooms, a widow. Both were regular customers to whom he had sold Lincolns.

In thinking back about her childhood, Millie remembers, "there was discipline (yes, with spankings). We all had chores. We didn't sleep in on Sat. mornings. Mother wakened us with, 'Girls get up; there's work to do'. Dad left orders for the boys. We learned to share whether it was food or getting a turn to ride the 2nd hand bicycle Jack and Howard bought with money they had earned caddying at Wildwood Country Club."

All the children remember a happy childhood. Bob says his "Mom and Dad always showed a lot of love to each of us; no one seemed to be shown more attention than the others." Betty remembers, "Her Mother as her best friend." Jeanne adds, "God blessed us with such loving parents that we still love each other so very much."

THE WAR YEARS AND AFTER

Richard, the last of John and Olga's children was born in Dec. 1934. He was the only child that was born in a hospital. A midwife had assisted Olga at home with the births of all the other children.

Sometime at the end of the 30's, John left the automobile industry. He went to work at a place called Lewis Foundry—a steel foundry, machine shop, and production facility. The company made 16"shells for the navy, and he, eventually, became foreman of the shell line. He stayed at this company for many years, even after the war ended. Rich remembers that "During the Vietnam War when the battleship New Jersey was recommissioned, John was asked, long after he'd left the company, to act as a consultant to re-establish the 16" shell line at Lewis Foundry."

When Richard was born, Jack was already attending college at Capital U. in Columbus, Ohio. Early in 1935, Olga wasn't feeling well after Rich's birth and required an operation, and it was the middle of the depression. Jack decided to leave college in his sophomore year and go home to help. John bought Jack a 1931 Ford dump truck and gave him \$100 to start him in a business. Jack started "Sirney Service" to haul coal, concrete blocks, and similar items.

A year later Jack met Catherine Geissinger. When Jack brought her home for dinner, Kaye says, "I was astounded when I walked in the living room and saw 9 lovely and handsome blondes (of varying shades) lined up on the 2 sofas. They were all neatly dressed, combed, and brushed. I do believe they were sitting with their hands folded in their laps."

Jack and Kaye married in Jan. 1939. Olga helped them plan the wedding and had the reception at the family's house. Kaye moved into the Sirney household in 1942 when Jack left for combat in WWII. Cathie was 9 mos. old. Kaye says, "I dearly loved my mother-in-law. She was my best friend. She told me how to buy things and not tell Jack about it. She sat with me through 20 hrs. of hard labor when Cathie was born. She was wonderful."

Howard recalls, when he was 18, going to the Indianapolis 500 Race in his '34 Ford convertible. He says, "the night before my friends and I joined the lines of cars waiting to enter the speedway. The top was down, the radio was on, and people were dancing in the street. The next morning I entered the speedway; we wound up in the center. We couldn't see the race, but at least we were there".

Howard met Marion in late '37. He says, "I thought Marian was a spoiled brat. She would drive in the parking lot of the grocery store that the Sirney's owned in Warrendale. She squealed the tires on the gravel, raced into the store, helped herself to candy, threw

money on the counter, and raced back out." His opinion changed, however, and they eloped in 1939. Because of job requirements, they moved many times in the first 10 years of marriage. They bought an acre from John and Olga and moved into a house foundation in 1949. In 1951 they made the move to the farm in Enon Valley, PA. In 1957 Howard and Marian and 9 children joined the Sirney migration to Calif. They finally settled there in Oct. '58.

Millie worked at Kaufmann's in Pittsburgh throughout the war. She met Matt through Lois, who'd gone to Mars High School with him. They frequently double-dated with Ches and Lois. They went to places with all their friends where they could dance to the popular "big band" music. They married during a bad snowstorm in Feb.'45. Matt and Millie didn't move around like many of her siblings. Millie moved to the Hawkins farm after their wedding, and they still live there today.

Lois dated Ches for 5 years. 'They were married in March, 1944. They lived with John and Olga for 1 yr. in1946. They started the foundation for a house on Richland Rd. near the cherry orchard. During that time, North Pittsburgh Telephone Co. was selling a house a mile away on the old Harmony Short Line route. They bought that house and sold the foundation to John and Elva. Ches says, "I loved my mother-in-law, Olga, as much as my mother." The Bartos joined the Calif. migration in 1954 when Ches was 36 and Lois was 32. To Ches, California meant much better weather and better job opportunities.

Bette met Ernie through Millie. Ernie was from Etna and had gone to Etna High with Millie. He enlisted in the Marines. Bette was 19 when she "eloped." It wasn't a surprise to the family. Olga made her wedding suit and they knew she was going to Fla. to marry Ernie while he was stationed there. After their marriage they lived all over the world. After retirement they joined the Sirney family in Calif.

Bob and Ruth "met" when they were 2 yrs. old in the nursery at Trinity Lutheran Church in Gibsonia. Much later Bette convinced Bob to take Ruth to the high school play. After this romantic date, he simply said, "See you in church." Soon Bob went into the service, and Lois and Millie urged Bob to write to Ruth. He would write to her in code, and in the next letter, he'd translate what he wrote. They started dating when he returned from the service. The wedding at Trinity Lutheran was on July 2, 1948. They'd planned to wait a little longer, but an apartment had become available. Their 1st house was in Hampton Township, and in 1961 they moved to Ben Miller Rd.

Jeanne married Frank McDonald from Mars in 1948. It's said that his nickname "Hawk" came from "Hawkeye" as in pool-playing. Charlotte began a campaign to convince them to move to Calif. Jeanne and Debbie went first and lived with Charlotte and Jack. Soon they all convinced Hawk to move permanately to southern Calif. They loved it there. Jeanne got a job at The Broadway dept. store, and Charlotte took care of Debbie.

Charlotte married Jack Klinzing on Nov. 23, 1950. I'll always remember the wedding, because she had 4 flower girls in the wedding party—Sandy, Claudia, Cynthia, and me.

Three months later on Feb. 14, 1951 they left for southern Calif. because Jack had a job there. Charlotte loved Calif., but she was lonely and soon was mounting a campaign for Jeanne to move there also. Within 3 years she had convinced the McDonalds and the Bartos to join her in southern Calif.

Richard joined the Army while still in his teens. He remembers that the only girl he ever brought home was Lois. John, Olga, and his sister Olga were the only ones at home by then. He says, "after meeting her, they didn't know I was there. Then they found out she was a student nurse. They thought she was the greatest thing that ever happened to me." They married in Nov. 1955. Rich was in the service at the time and they moved around. Then they settled in PA.

THE LATER YEARS

John went to live on the Hawkins farm in the late 60's when he was about 80 years old. He was still a very vibrant, energetic man—very handsome too. He was still tall and thin with a mustache and great head of hair.

He kept very busy all the time. He took charge of the gardening—planting, pruning, and weeding—continuing a life-long passion. Eliz remembers him cutting grass with a push mower. He refinished the various old pieces of furniture around the house such as Matt and Millie's first oak kitchen table and chairs, and various antique dressers. Jane was fascinated by his taking of a "junky piece of furniture, working on it and making it beautiful." Refinishing furniture is now her hobby.

The Hawkins farm by this time was no longer a poultry farm. Sweet corn was the main cash crop now and the summers were very hectic after July 4th when the corn ripened. All the family pitched in to "pick corn." While John never physically got involved in this activity, he did start a wonderful tradition. Around 10am when the tired and dirty family came into the house, they would find 2 dozen fresh donuts waiting. Jon would leave about 9am every day to go to the bakery. We all looked forward to the treat and consumed them in a matter of minutes. A fresh donut still reminds me of those times.

John was a great story teller. Jeff and Jennifer Simmons remember John telling them stories for hours when they would visit. Millie would tell us to listen for clues about his early years, but he never talked about his parents.

John also traveled a lot in his retirement years. He had a large family to visit.

GRANDPARENTS

She died when I was 12. My grandmother, my only grandmother had died. She had a stroke while shopping at Sears, went to the hospital, and died. I didn't know what a stroke was, but I knew my life had changed. It was Feb. 27, 1957, my sister, Jane's birthday. John had just retired and he and Olga were preparing for a trip to Calif. to visit their family there. My cousins—Claudia, Sandy, and Judy had already moved. I had no one to share the sadness with. I knew there'd be no more knitting lessons. I looked at her in that coffin to try to understand just what death meant. I knew my life would never be the same.

For the grandchildren in the 1940's and 50's, going to our grandparents' house was a special event. We all remember Easter egg hunts outside dressed in our new Easter outfits complete with spring hats for the girls. Other times when we would visit, we would play hide-n-seek in the large rhododendrons, or play on the swing hanging from the big oak tree in back of the house. Sometimes we'd really explore, and follow the path through the woods to the cherry orchard.

Special occasions like Easter and Thanksgiving meant big family dinners around the largest table I'd ever seen. I was sure no one had a bigger table. Most of the aunts and uncles and cousins were still living in PA when I was young. We were all around that table which stretched from the dining room into the living room. The women had all been in the kitchen with Grandma preparing the meal and setting the table and talking. The men were in the living room or outside talking about cars and such. Once we all settled around the table and Granddad said grace, talking and laughing resumed throughout the meal. It was the most magical time.

Olga liked having her grandchildren around her. Cathie said that she always had a smile and a big hug for us. Claudia, Barbara, Ellen, and I used to spend the night with her. We slept upstairs. Rich had already joined the service. Olga (Jr.) was still living at home and she slept in the bedroom next to us.

Claudia remembers Aunt Olga's large salt and pepper collection. You could look but not touch all those fascinating, miniature pieces. Claudia also says, "Anytime I smell lilacs or hear the sound of gravel in a driveway, I think of being at my grandparents' home."

Cathie recalls living there for awhile while her father was away in the service. Granddad's pet names for her were "Shorty" and "Katrina".

Janet, Mark, and Paul remember staying there one New Years Eve when there had been a snow storm. They ran upstairs to see where their father, Bob, had slept as well as all their

aunts and uncles. Later when it was their home, those same aunts and uncles would come home, go upstairs, and reminisce—saying "I used to sleep in this room, that is now yours", or "Remember when the lightning came through the window and struck Bob on the iron bed?" That made them feel real secure.

Grandma loved to knit and crochet. She made 7" dolls with knitted or crocheted outfits for all the older female cousins. Ellen says that she picked out the outfit she wanted from a pattern book—a gypsy woman with hat and pantaloons under her dress. 50 years later we all still have our dolls.

Grandma taught me to knit. I was very slow and I always looked at the needles, but I did knit a few sweaters. Most magical of all to me was a bedspread she crocheted for me. It's constructed of squares that eventually were sewn together into the complete spread. She kept the squares in the bottom drawer of a dresser in the "spare" bedroom on the 1st floor. Every time I would visit, she would open that drawer to show me how many squares were complete. Eventually the squares were sewn together and fringe added on 3 sides to complete this spectacular, beige double bedspread

After Lewis Foundry, John had work briefly for another Ford dealer, Laris Motors. Then in the early 50's, he became the general manager of Bilco, a sports car dealership. Rich says, "John soon discovered there was a big demand for small, economical, reliable, ugly cars—the VW. The dealership was soon converted to VW only and became very successful." It was his first experience with "imported" cars. He retired from Bilco in 1957, just two weeks before Olga died. A couple of years later, when he was about 70, John entered the work force again. Fiat, the Italian car, was being introduced to Pitts. John helped them set up their showroom and sell this newest, small, imported car. A few years later, he retired for the 2nd and last time.

John continued to live on Ben Miller Rd-- first by himself and then with Bob and Ruth. He also traveled extensively to visit his far-flung family—California, Hawaii, Alabama, North Carolina, and Florida.

In 1963 when I was 17 and had just graduated from high school, John wanted to visit Bette and Ernie at Camp LeJuene, NC. He was worried about driving that distance. So I drove him to NC in his Ford sedan. He stayed with Bette and Ernie, and I flew to Charleston SC to visit my Hawkins cousin. A week later we reversed the process. I know we talked the whole trip. John loved to tell stories.

Reiss recalls meeting John for the first time at Jack and Kaye's house. He was in a tree on a ladder pulling off the Spanish moss. Reiss decided this was a great family to marry into, where all the men were so strong. John had lots of ideas about health. He told Reiss that he should always use cayenne pepper on his food, because it was much healthier than black pepper.

Cathie recalls that when she was young, she thought John was more formal than Olga, probably because he was usually in a suit and smoked a pipe. He would explain the

different pipes to her. It was John who showed her to eat the ends of Olga's fresh baked bread. To this day Cathie eats the ends of a loaf of bread.

John went to live on the Hawkins farm in the late 60's when he was about 80 years old. He was still a very vibrant, energetic man—very handsome too. He was still tall and thin with a mustache and great head of hair.

He kept busy all the time. He took charge of the gardening—planting, pruning, and weeding—continuing a life-long passion. Elizabeth remembers him cutting grass and planting the shrubs and all the oak trees. She also recalls that when he came home from a trip, there were always home movies to watch in the basement. John refinished the various old pieces of furniture around the house, such as Matt and Millie's first oak kitchen table and chairs, and various antique dressers. Jane was fascinated by his working on a "junky piece of furniture, and making it beautiful." Refinishing furniture is now her hobby.

The Hawkins farm by this time was no longer a poultry farm. Sweet corn was the main cash crop, and summers were very hectic after July 4th when the sweet corn ripened. All the family pitched in to "pick corn". While John never physically got involved in this activity, my husband, Tim, reminded me of a wonderful tradition that John started. Around 10am when the tired and dirty family came into the house, they would find 2 dozen fresh donuts waiting. John would leave about 9am every day to go to the bakery. We all looked forward to the treat and consumed them in a matter of minutes. A fresh donut still reminds us of those times.

John and Olga Sirney—we miss you!

Recently Debbie Marxen wrote about her own childhood memories of the Sirney family. I know she's captured my feelings and, I suspect, everyone else's too.

FAMILY GATHERINGS

My first memories of the Sirney Family were of big families! There were lots of children every time we got together. I was an only child for my first ten years so naturally any family over four or five seemed big to me!

But I loved it! I anticipated those family gatherings for days. I dreamed about my cousins. I knew that I would be running and screaming and laughing and going literally wild for the 8 to 10 hours we were together. I turned into a "wild child" with little or no effort on my part…it just happened! I'm sure my parents wondered how the transformation took place, being as I was generally quiet and calm in our neat and tidy "threesome" environment. But seeing all those children did something to me! I wanted to be a part of their sibling activities. Let the games begin!!!

And so our "Sirney Get-togethers" began. From my viewpoint as one of the younger cousins it was time to play. The adults would proceed to the nearest gathering spot. It could be the kitchen where my aunts would be constantly cooking something; the living room, if the weather prevented them from being outside; by the swimming pool if there was one; but generally the California weather led everyone outside. That was what drew half of the Sirney clan to California in the first place.... The California sunshine! So as I remember most of our gatherings occurred outside in the back yard.

When I look back, the only thing I remember my parents and aunts and uncles doing when they got together is talking! They sat around in big circles of lawn chairs and talked! If there was a swimming pool, they swam and talked. So basically, I saw the adults talking. That was my limited child's view of the situation!

The cousins, however, were busy! When we assembled there was a time of shyness. That was the "getting reacquainted" stage. That was short lived as we saw the lay of the land and started deciding what our games would be for the day's play. I remember "Hide and Seek". "Statue Maker", "Mother may I?", "Red light, green light", Red rover", Hop scotch", "Jacks" and many others that

we made up as we went along. Inside the house we played lots of card games, board games, dolls, and dress-up, put on plays, sang songs and arranged elaborate musical productions to perform for our parents---if we could get them to stop talking long enough to watch! As we got older, we listened to records and talked about everything that was important to us—Elvis, Ricky Nelson, Bomb Shelters, Boys, Dolls, the Ponytail Club, The Mickey Mouse Club, Annette, School, Radio Stations, Disneyland, Dancing, the War, the End of the World, Going to Heaven and what it would be like when we were teenagers! It was a wonderful time of innocence and exploring. It was the only time that I, being the only cousin without siblings, experienced what it was like to have brothers and sisters, even if it was only for 8 or 10 short hours!

Dinnertime was always an event at a "Sirney Gathering". So many to try to seat around the table, but it was always accomplished. A large dining room table was a must in a Sirney household. The more that could sit around the main table the better, and only when absolutely necessary did you seat the children at another table. We needed to be all together at dinner time. Everyone talked! I mean everyone at once! I'm sure it sounded like a large hive of bees as the conversations rose and fell over many topics. I remember as a child that it was time to leave the table when the uncles started talking about war or politics! That was our clue that dinner was over, and the adults would continue around the table with talk, laughter, and arguments about topics none of us were interested in. When we were young, we ran off happily to continue our games. As we got older, we cleared the table and washed the dishes (automatic dishwashers having yet to be invented or affordable).

Everyone wanted to wash, but that job always went to the oldest cousins. They had the most authority, and we all had to listen to what they said! The rest of us were handed a dish towel for drying, and we took turns picking each dish and utensil out of the dish drainer as the dish washer washed as fast as possible. Someone put away the dishes, or we left them cleaned and sparkling on the counter for the aunts to put away later.

The best part of washing the dishes was the singing that went on. Everyone would suggest a song, and the singing would begin. Some of the girls were great harmonizers, and I thought we sounded like an angel choir as we belted out songs like "The Old Mill Stream", Sippin' Cider", "I've Been Working On The Railroad", "The Old Rugged Cross", Matches", Love Me Tender", and "Jesus Loves the Little Children". We sang everything, and because of that I have the

best memories of washing and drying dishes. "Sirney Dish Washing" was an experience to treasure, and I did.

After dinner and dishes, if we were lucky, we went outside for some "night games". They were the best! Hide and Seek in the dark, Statue Maker, or "Beep-Beep" in the swimming pool.

Too soon the aunts and uncles called us inside, and we began our good-byes until the next visit. It was a sad parting. I remember as I fell asleep on the back seat of the car on our way home that I wished I had lots of brothers and sisters like all my cousins. They were going home together, and I was sure that they had that same kind of fun everyday at their homes!

When I was ten, my parents blessed me with a baby brother, and I joined the ranks of my cousins with a sibling of my own. Although out family never caught up with everyone else in numbers, I still felt better because now I had someone to go home with too!!!

"Sirney Gatherings" will always be a major part of my childhood memories. Those memories were and still are to this day what make up who I was as a child. It's how I remember ME! Without my "Sirney Family" memories, my childhood would have been a lonely time. But because of aunts, uncles, and lots of cousins, I have cherished memories of wonderful gatherings. Most importantly I feel that our present day "Sirney Family Reunions" pass on the important times together to my children. Now they are making memories with their own cousins!

Thank you Grandma and Granddad Sirney for making it all possible!!!