

14. The Bolton Sisters: Nell, Margaret, Alberta and Betty

By

Gary Wiggins

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My mother, Nellie Lee Bolton was born in 1920 and was the first of the Bolton girls in Heaverin and Corrine's marriage. Aunt Margaret Louise Bolton came along in 1922 and was the only other child born in Ohio County, Kentucky. All others were born in Central City, Muhlenberg County, Kentucky: Alberta Marie (b. 1927), Betty Joyce (b. 1935), along with the two Bolton males, William Paxton (b. 1924) and Edward Earl ("Dick," b. 1937).



Alberta, Margaret, and Nell Bolton on Old Dave

Mother and Aunt Marg Grace were the closest in age and, over the years, the closest of the sisters in friendship. The two teenage girls were together on a high railroad track in Central City one day when some boys with a shotgun began clowning around and attempted to scare them. They heard a shot, and Mom shouted, "Marg, they shot you!" Apparently, the shock of the wound was so great that Aunt Marg didn't feel the pain at first. The shotgun blast hit her right hand and thigh, resulting in the loss of her little finger on that hand. The leg wound left a large scar and indentation that was clearly visible when she wore shorts in later life.

Aunt Marg was my favorite aunt, and I marvel at how she could remain so full of life and happy when she had to endure so many trials. It was she who lost the two young children, Bobby and Ginny, killed in 1953 and 1955 respectively in car mishaps by next-door neighbors in their driveways.

In 1957 during the pregnancy with her sixth and last child, Daniel Wayne Grace, a large tumor was discovered on one of Aunt Marg's kidneys, and she underwent a major operation. My junior year in high school in 1959/60 was spent in Aunt Marg and Uncle Tip's home in the Pleasant Ridge housing

project at 218 Marcy Street. Danny lived a good portion of that time in Greens Fork, Indiana with my mom and stepdad. He was there because another serious health problem was discovered for Aunt Marg, and she had stones removed from the other kidney. When she returned home, she had a drainage tube coming out of her side. Six of us were living in the 4-room half of a duplex in the project, but she still insisted on doing such tasks as ironing clothes and helping prepare meals. An image I'll always remember is Aunt Marg standing at an ironing board with the tube draining into a flask on the floor. She would sometimes forget about the tube and walk across the floor, pulling the tube out of the flask.

In mid-November 1943, Mom was visiting Grandad and Mammy Dennis in Central City, and Aunt Marg was there too. She appeared to get violently ill. When Mom asked her if they should send for Dr. Harrelson, she gasped, "I think so since I'm having a baby." This was quite a shock since no one in the family suspected she was pregnant. She wore a girdle, bulky sweaters and other loose-fitting clothing to conceal her condition. When Dr. Harrelson delivered a healthy baby girl, Lana Marie, he asked Aunt Marg what name to put on the birth certificate as the father. "Why, Clifton Grace, of course," she replied.

Aunt Marg and Uncle Tip were married in Louisville on a bitterly cold winter day in 1944, with Mom as the witness. Mamaw Corrine Bolton's bible says that Margaret Bolton married Clifton ("Tip") Grace on 1/10/1941 in Louisville, KY. However, Uncle Tip's WW II enlistment record says he was single on January 15, 1943 when he joined the Army and that he was born in 1923. That would have made him just under 20 years old when he enlisted, but there is some evidence that he falsified his true age to join the service at that time. (1) Lana's birth certificate, issued as *Lanna* Marie Grace on 1/17/1944, shows his age as 20. It's very likely that Uncle Tip's Army service prevented him from marrying Aunt Marg earlier in 1943. Although I am not sure where he was during that year, at one time Uncle Tip served in India, and mother always said he developed malaria during that time. (2)



Uncle Tip Grace among a work crew creating a swimming pool (in India?)

Theirs was another of the marriages in our family that lasted, as the 50th anniversary picture below attests.



Aunt Marg and Uncle Tip at their 50th anniversary celebration

Aunt Marg was famous in our family for her malapropisms. At their 50th anniversary party, I told a story about one such incident when her first son, David, had a problem with his private parts. Our longtime doctor in Charlestown was Dr. Eli Goodman, so Aunt Marg told David he needed to pay a visit to him. David was hesitant to go and said, “Mom, what am I going to say to Dr. Goodman?” Aunt Marg promptly replied, “Just tell him you’ve got something wrong with your Gentiles!” (3)

Uncle Tip must have developed some keen-eyed marksmanship skills at some point in his life. He once took me to the house we were renting that was erected on one of the concrete slabs at the rocket plant site six miles east of Charlestown. As we pulled up in front of the house, we saw Mom running down a side road toward us. She had found a snake crawling into a bird’s nest, and she and the mother bird were fighting the snake to keep it from eating the eggs. Uncle Tip grabbed my .22 rifle and went to the tree where the snake was hunkered down in the nest. When it cautiously stuck its head up to see if it was safe to come out of the nest, one shot rang out, and the headless snake tumbled to the ground.

Uncle Tip was a very good man, and neither he nor Aunt Marg was a harsh disciplinarian. I never saw Uncle Tip lay a hand on any of his children, despite occasional threats of “Settle down, or I’m going to get hold of you in about five minutes.” As Mom said in a 1965 letter to Aunt Seabay, “Tip is as good as gold. His only fault is drinking.” Uncle Tip did like to drink beer and, along with his brother-in-law, Bill Bolton, frequented the beer joints in Charlestown on weekends. He would apparently stop drinking for extended periods of time, but the end of one of those periods of abstinence was noted when Mamaw Bolton stated in a 1974 letter to Seabay that he had started drinking again. In October of 1980, Uncle Tip was in the hospital, amassing a \$6700 bill for the stay. Aunt Marg wrote to Seabay that it was all paid by his GE insurance. He was apparently working at the Louisville GE Appliance Park as early as 1960. A City Directory from that date indicates he was a welder at GE. Both he and Aunt Marg were smokers. Ultimately, it was lung cancer that killed him in 2003.

In a letter Mom wrote to Seabay in 1968, she said about Aunt Marg, "I don't know why someone so good has so much trouble." On April 17, 1970 Aunt Marg's kidney problem put her in the hospital again for five days. X-rays revealed that she had a big stone in her remaining kidney. She said that Danny Grace would be 13 years old in June, and that was how long it had been since she had the one kidney taken out.

A May 8, 1970 letter from Mamaw Bolton to Seabay contained the information that Aunt Marg and David were going to church, and Aunt Marg was saved two weeks before. I think they joined the Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church that was built behind the Marcy Street duplex where they lived for many years. On top of all her health problems, Aunt Marg suffered from severe migraine headaches and periodic ear infections. The migraines were an affliction she shared with Aunt Seabay. After the second kidney operation, the doctors predicted that she would live only a year, but she survived nearly 40 years, dying on December 5, 1998, a testimony to her strength of will and love of life. It is too bad Aunt Marg didn't make it to Christmas that year, because that was always her favorite season. She went to great lengths to decorate the tree and the house, and greatly enjoyed the exchange of presents.

Alberta Marie Bolton was listed in the 1940 census as 13 years of age, single, and living with Mamaw and Papaw Bolton. A November 9, 1941 entry in Mom's autograph book reads, "When you get married and go through High School, don't do like me and marry a fool. Alberta". At first, I assumed this was written by her sister, but later found that Alberta and Leo E. "Buddy" Kelley were not married until around October 17, 1945. (4) Their first son, Grant Lee Kelley, was born October 24, 1946.

Alberta and Mom had earlier discussed what names would be given to their babies if they had boys. Mother liked the name "Grant," and Alberta chose "Gary," so that's what they intended to call their first-born sons. Mom had a very difficult delivery on September 15, 1943 and was so knocked out by the anesthesia that she got confused and named me "Gary." When she regained consciousness enough to see me, she started calling me "Grant," and the nurse had to correct her. In fact, I have a copy of a letter dated September 20, 1943 from my great-grandmother Sudie Wiggins that is written to Mr. *Grant* Wiggins stating ". . . how proud I am that you have arrived."

Alberta's second child, Patricia Ann, was born October 2, 1951, when Alberta and Buddy's address was 834 S. First Street in Louisville. (5) Alberta had a stillborn son sometime in the 1940s. Pat Kelley Wright thinks his given names were Carl Robert. He is buried in the Central City Fairmount Cemetery in an unmarked grave not far from where Grandad and Mammy Dennis and Uncle Herman and Aunt Bertha Bolton are buried. I recall that mother pointed it out to me on several occasions when we visited the grave sites of our ancestors there.

Buddy Kelley was quite a character. He walked with a limp. Bill Bolton said that the limp got much more pronounced when Buddy was approaching a house where he was trying to make a sale as a Watkins product door-to-door salesman. In fact, Bill said that if Buddy got into a home, he used the opportunity to case the joint. If something really caught his eye, he would return at night, break in, and steal it. Yes, Buddy was a thief, but a likeable one. A tavern owner in Charlestown said that if Buddy worked for him, he would never have to worry about him stealing the cash, but the coins would be gone in the blink of an eye. Newspaper stories confirm Buddy's attraction to small change. He was caught when he tried to steal a coin purse containing \$2.84 from an employee of the Internal Revenue Bureau, resulting in a charge of "theft from a government reservation." (6)



Leo Edwin "Buddy" Kelley

In the early 1950s, Buddy and Bill Bolton were operating a service station just north of the viaduct at the intersection of Indiana state highways 3 and 62. One of the beer joints in Charlestown was robbed, and Buddy and Bill were nabbed for the caper. About \$360 was taken from the tavern, \$300 in dimes. The mythical story in our family was that they did indeed steal the money, but to conceal the crime, they went to the service station, took a wheel off one of their cars, and stashed the money in a tire, which they put back on the car. That was false. The money was found in a stove at the service station, as reported in the newspaper story on their sentencing. (7) Both received terms of two to five years in the Indiana Reformatory in Pendleton.

At the court hearing, Alberta supposedly attempted to get Buddy's sentence reduced. Pleading that she had two small children to care for, she laid the blame on Bill Bolton, claiming that Bill planned it all and enticed Buddy to join in. Bill Bolton never forgave her for that. They rarely spoke after Bill served his time in the Indiana Reformatory, the same facility that initially housed John Dillinger from 1924 to 1929 before he was transferred to the Michigan City facility from which he escaped.

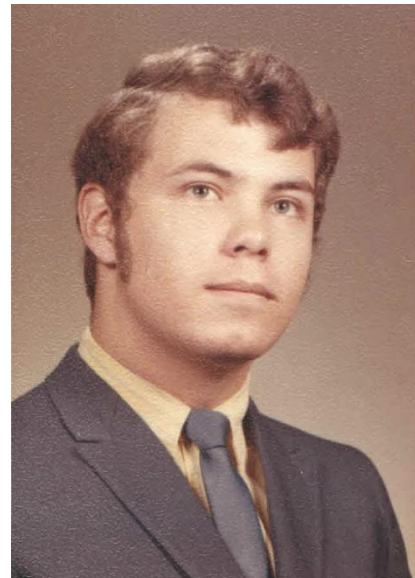
The animosity between Bill Bolton and Alberta is reflected in the wills Bill signed. In a June 15, 1985 document, he named mother, me, and Dick (Edward Earl) Bolton as the successive recipients of his estate. In a revised will dated July 2, 1991, Bill clarified that upon his death, the property was to go in equal shares to mother, me, and Dick, stating, "It is my intention in this paragraph to exclude all of my other relatives born before or after this will is executed, including specifically my sisters, Betty J. Bolton, Margaret Grace, and Alberta Kelly (*sic*)."

I walked by the Kelleys' duplex early one morning when they lived up the street from our old project house on Halcyon Road. Their son Mike had opened a window and was throwing raw eggs into the yard. He was also pitching out old coins, so I knocked on the door and got Alberta up. (I never called her Aunt Alberta, for some reason.) She showed me a box of mostly 19th-century coins that Buddy had apparently stolen. She gave me several of them, and most of those are now owned by my son Tom.

One of the classic stories in our family involving Buddy Kelley concerns a very tough time in the Grace household. Uncle Tip had been out of work for quite a while, and the cupboards were close to being bare. Buddy breezed in late one evening and sized up the situation. He reached into his pocket, pulled

out a \$20 bill and gave it to Aunt Marg, saying, “Marg, these kids are hungry. Take this money and buy some food tomorrow.” Aunt Marg put the \$20 bill in the closet outside the front bedroom, the repository for all important documents in the Grace house. When she got up the next morning to go to the grocery store, the \$20 was not there. Buddy stopped in again later that day, and Aunt Marg accused him of coming back that night and taking the money. “Marg, how *could* you accuse me of that, when I gave you the last bit of money I had.” He left in a huff, but many months later, in a more prosperous time during some merrymaking at the Grace house, Buddy apparently felt a twinge of conscience. With a laugh he said, “Marg, this has been bothering me a while. I did take that \$20 bill.”

While Buddy was incarcerated with Bill in Pendleton, Alberta had another son, Michael Lewis Kelley, born on February 21, 1953. She always claimed that Mike was conceived when Buddy stopped in to see her during a trip for which he was chosen to drive a prison official from the reformatory to the Louisville area. Buddy could charm people into doing a lot of things that others wouldn't dream of trying, so I suppose this is plausible. On the other hand, mother always said that Alberta had a boyfriend while Buddy was “on vacation” at Pendleton.



Patricia Ann Kelley Wright around 1968 and Michael Lewis Kelley around 1971

Alberta had mental problems, much later in life diagnosed as schizophrenia and controlled by drugs. Pat traces her trouble to the time when Mamaw Bolton abandoned the family in the early 1930s and returned pregnant with Betty Joyce. The separation from Corrine was apparently very traumatic for Alberta, and she is said to have cried a lot during that time. She became the favorite child of her father, Heaverin, a status that she held throughout his entire life.

Alberta and Buddy had one more child, a son, Anthony Wayne Kelley, born March 12, 1961. Alberta lived for the most part in the project during this time, but I don't think that Buddy was with them much. It was a difficult time for the Kelleys, and Alberta frequently sent the children out to “borrow” food, money, cigarettes, etc. from neighbors and relatives. She always kept her children clean and provided for them as best she could.

One day, my best friend, [Corky Richmond](#), and I stopped by to see Alberta and the kids. We were talking at the front door when Alberta launched into a tale about a conflict in Louisville where a woman had

gotten into a dispute with her lover. Alberta paused and said, "Do you know what she did to him?" Immediately, the six-year-old Mike stuck his head around the corner and yelled, "Shot his dick off!" Corky was impressed that Mike had such a grasp of current events in Louisville. It was during this visit that Patricia cut her little finger quite badly on the sharp rim of a toy she was playing with. She clearly needed stitches, but Alberta made us wait to take her to Dr. Goodman's office until she had cleaned her up.



Corrine Bolton, Bill Bolton and Alberta Bolton at the Gregory house around 1930

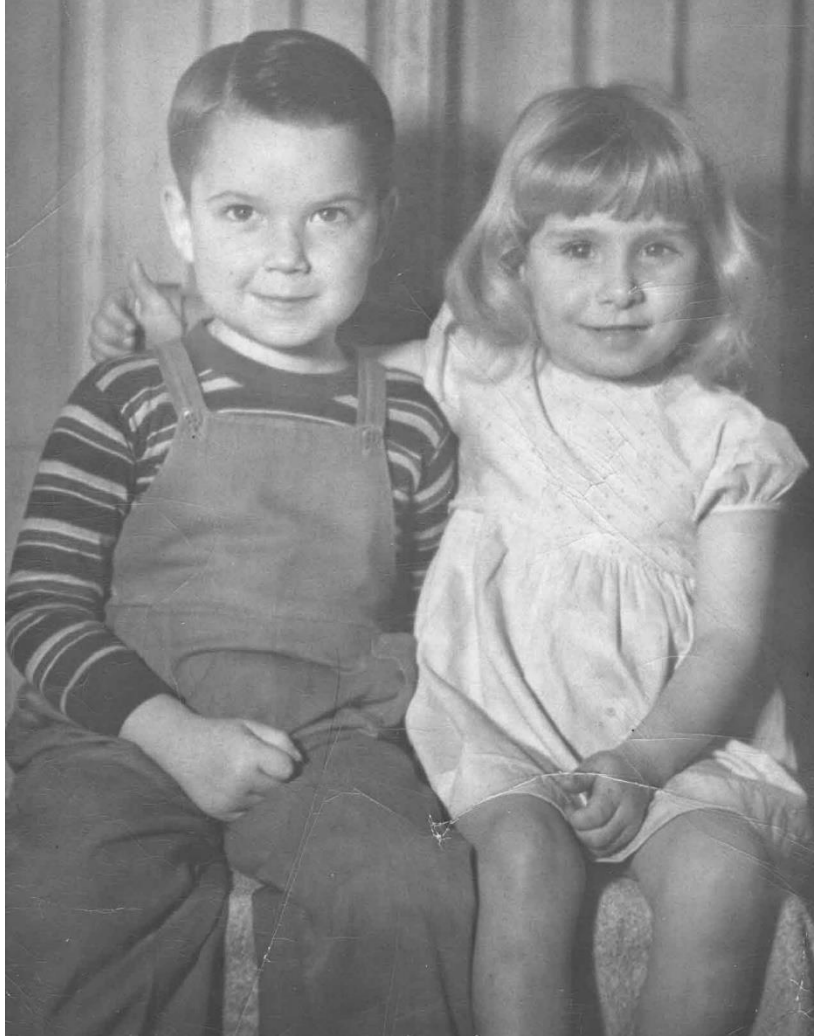
Alberta's mental state continued to deteriorate during the next few years, and at some point, a divorce entered the picture. Buddy picked her up one day to go to the county seat to file the papers. When they reached the south edge of Charlestown, instead of heading west for Jeffersonville, Buddy turned east toward Madison, where the state mental hospital was located. Buddy had Alberta committed, then left the area shortly thereafter. He eventually was found in Baltimore, Maryland many years later.

At this point, the three youngest children were placed in foster homes around the Clarksville area. I don't think that the oldest child, Grant, was included in the placement, and he may have lived with Mamaw and Papaw Bolton for a while. My mother and stepfather, Everett Crowley, wanted to adopt Pat when she was born, but Alberta changed her mind and didn't allow it. Pat did eventually live with Nell and Everett. However, during the 1966-67 school year Pat came to Bloomington with Mom to live with me during my first year of graduate school at IU. Mom and Everett were separated at that time, the result of one of his apparently numerous affairs that became painfully obvious to Mom. Pat then went with mother to Oldenburg, Indiana where they settled when they got back together with Everett after about a year of being in Bloomington.

Mike was moved around to various homes before landing in a very bad environment on a farm near Brownstown, Indiana. He came to live with me in Bloomington in 1969 and, upon finishing high school there, promptly married his high school sweetheart from Brownstown, Linda Joyce Manion. I am not sure where Tony found homes during the intervening years before reaching adulthood. Alberta was eventually released from the mental hospital, went through some turbulent times, and late in her life was finally prescribed medication that brought her schizophrenia under control.

The youngest of the Bolton sisters, Betty Joyce, was the first to die, at the age of 57 on October 11, 1992. I have commented on her in other chapters, so there is not a lot more to say about Betty. Toward the end of her life, she had the odd habit of sitting in a chair with her legs extended straight out, a

position she was able to hold for long periods of time. More about the eldest of the sisters, Nell, my mother, appears in the chapter on Everett Crowley, a story that I found difficult to put into words.



Gary Dorman Wiggins and Lana Marie Grace around 1947



Nell Crowley on her 90th Birthday

I hope that the mood produced by this somewhat gloomy chapter may be lightened somewhat by the inclusion of the story “How Bill Was Cured of His Drinking Problem” in the appendix chapter. It is another of Roy Lindsey’s “Born, Bred, and Buttered in Kentucky” stories.

NOTES

1. “54 Greenville Men to Leave for Army.” *Messenger-Inquirer* (Owensboro, Kentucky), January 22, 1943, p. 2.
2. At Christmas time in 1944, we were living with Aunt Marg and Lana in the Gish Apartments on Broad Street in Central City. One of the stories Mom told was how I woke up crying one night. She didn’t turn on the lights, but just rocked me back to sleep. The next morning, it was obvious from the blood that something had bitten me on the hand—a rat! They packed the walls with rat poison, and we never had that problem again.
3. Dr. Eli Goodman was a former military doctor, and his brother was a pharmacist. They both settled in Charlestown, and the brother opened a pharmacy there. They had a 2-way radio connection directly between Dr. Goodman’s office and the drug store, so he could call in the prescriptions (thus preventing his patients from taking their prescriptions to one of the other two drug stores in Charlestown, Bottorff’s and Tobias’s). Dr. Goodman eventually branched out into newspaper publishing, and he hired a man named Mr. Love as the editor. Mr. Love owned

a very small 3-wheeled car called an Isetta. Once he parked the Isetta in front of the local Charlestown pool hall and went off in search of a story. The pool hall entrance sat at least 3 feet above street level, and when he returned, Mr. Love found the tiny car perched on the sidewalk. He got very angry and started yelling at the cackling boys who were obviously enjoying their prank. Dr. Goodman happened to drive by at that time, and he jumped into the fray. He told the boys that Mr. Love had a serious heart condition and he was furious that the incident had potentially put his life in danger. Without a smile, he said to them, "I've got half a mind to buy this damned town and put all of you Gentiles in bondage!" [This story was told to me by my uncle, Dick Bolton, who supposedly witnessed it (and may have been one of the participants).]

4. Among the marriage license applicants in the *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Kentucky), October 17, 1945, p. 20 are "Leo E. Kelley, 18, truck driver, 247 E. Madison; Alberta M. Bolton, 17, of 433 S. First." The 1940 Census shows Buddy's age as 12. His Social Security Death Record has a birth date of 23 April 1927, in agreement with the age of 18 stated on their marriage license application. However, his original Social Security application has a birth date of 23 April 1925.
5. Pat's birth to Mrs. Leo E. Kelley on October 2, 1951 is noted in *The Louisville Courier Journal*, October 24, 1951, p. 26.
6. "Full Treatment Given Man on Charge of Theft." *The Owensboro Messenger* (Owensboro, Kentucky), October 7, 1950, p. 8. Also: "Theft of \$2.84 Brings Out U. S. Forces." *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Kentucky), October 7, 1950, p. 11. Buddy had other run-ins with the law. *The Courier-Journal* lists on January 24, 1947, p. 26 "Attempted storehouse break-in George R. Allen, Leo E. Kelly (*sic*), and Charles W. Stinson. *The Courier Journal* also lists on December 12, 1951, p. 14, a law suit filed by Thomas H. Philpot against Otto Feidler and Leo E. Kelley for damages. Another story titled "Charlestown Man Nabbed After Wild 95 MPH Chase (*The Evening News*, Jeffersonville, IN, March 4, 1955, p. 1) indicates that Buddy's limp didn't prevent him from running to try to escape police when he wrecked his car during the chase.
7. "Pair Sentenced Today for Series of Burglaries at Charlestown." *The Evening News* (Jeffersonville, IN), September 19, 1952, p. 1.

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