

# GARDNER NEWSLETTER

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A NEWSLETTER FOR THE GARDNER'S FRIENDS AND FAMILY

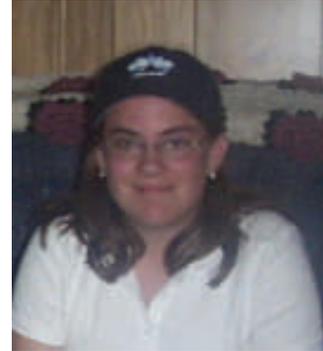
## An Example to Live By—A Tribute to my Great Aunt Nita

By: **Becky Griffes**

**M**y Great Aunt Nita was a person who, it seemed, everyone knew. She had strong faith in God, she was very loving, and she had an impact on everyone. She once said, "I am so blessed with good health, I have hardly had to even ever take an aspirin." She was one of those people who you would expect to live to be over 100. Then she started having some problems. The doctor said she had had several mini-strokes. For quite some time, they weren't completely sure what was wrong. Finally, after many tests, she was diagnosed with Lou Gherig's disease (ALS). This was quite a shock to us because she had always been so healthy. As the disease progressed, she couldn't talk; then she couldn't eat and had to have a feeding tube put in. She lost a

lot of weight, and about a month before she died, she was admitted into a nursing home. Death could have come in several different, horrible ways; she could have choked or suffocated, or she could have even starved. Thankfully, Aunt Nita died peacefully — she just fell asleep. Still, we all grieved, first when she was diagnosed, and again when she died.

Aunt Nita's death didn't necessarily change my life, but I saw the impact she left on so many people's lives. She inspired me to live a life full of love and kindness towards others, as well as to have strong faith in God. Before she died, I knew that Aunt Nita was an amazing person. There were always huge family gatherings at her house, she loved to cook for other people, and she was always smiling. But I don't think I knew just how much she meant to a lot of people until they spoke at her fu-



Becky Griffes at her cousin's, Cole Hosford's, 1st birthday party in July, 2003. Her Great Aunt Nita was there that day too.

neral. "She's the reason I'm a Christian and I'm here today," said one person. One of her caretakers, who had only known her for a couple of weeks, said that even though she only knew her for a short time, Aunt Nita had left an impression on her. "She was an amazing person. What a *legacy*." Another person said that even after she witnessed siblings, children, grand-

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### Special points of interest:

- Becky Griffes writes a moving tribute to Aunt Nita and enters a writing contest at the same time.
- See your editor caught in a pose of total surprise captured on his birthday.
- Whatever happened to the Miss Newport Diner on East Main Street in Newport, VT?

## An Example to live by *(continued)*

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Beulah and Don Griffes, Becky's Great Aunt Nita, Gloria Parsons and Raymond Gardner at Cole Hosford's 1st birthday party

**"It's good to know people are turning to God. He is our only hope."**



Cole Hosford at his first birthday party in July, 2003. Many of the pictures used in this issue were taken at his party. Cole's parents are Sheryl and Gary Hosford. Grandparents are Beulah and Don Griffes.

children, and many other people she knew die -- and even after she couldn't talk, eat, or be at home -- she was *still* smiling. Only faith in God and love for everyone (even those who get on one's nerves) can keep someone smiling through all that.

Another thing people noted about Aunt Nita was that children ran to her and loved her. She was kind, she loved them, and she *was fun*. When we were little, she babysat me, my sister, and my brother a few times, and she babysat my cousins as well. I don't remember most of that, but pictures show just how much fun we had at her house. On the day of her funeral, as we went up to the cemetery past her house, everything I saw brought back so many memories from childhood — the Christmas tree on top of the silo at the farm by her house, family reunions, her dog "Pepper," the exercise bike in her basement (to a little kid, an exercise bike is fun), and so many other things that seem small, but mean something to me. Many people will remember her for a long time because of things like these.

Something that helped

me to see part of Aunt Nita that I had never seen before was a bunch of "Round Robin" letters she had written. My grandfather put a pamphlet of these letters together. They start while she was still healthy and go until she could no longer talk. In the first two letters, dated September 7, 2000, and March 26, 2001, Aunt Nita didn't talk of her health. Nothing was wrong with her. She mainly talked about family and other basic happenings. Even on October 5, 2001, there was no hint of her illness. In this letter, she talks of the events of September 11, 2001. "What a tragedy. Our country has always been so safe. We haven't appreciated it. It's good to know people are turning to God. He is our only hope." About her health, she says, "I am really healthy and able to take care of this place. I am grateful because I'm nearly 80 years old, and it doesn't seem possible, as I used to think 80 was really old." The next letter in the pamphlet, dated April 23, 2002, shows a change. "The doctor discovered I had real high blood pressure, so he sent me for a cat scan because I was having problems with my throat. That didn't show a stroke. Then he sent me for a

MRI, which showed I did have several mini-strokes. I feel great, but still have problems talking. Maybe the Lord has decided that I talk too much!" (She still had a sense of humor!) Less than a year later, on November 20, 2002, things had gotten worse. She had been diagnosed with Lou Gherig's disease. She said, "what I have is Bulbar Palsy, as it affects my speech and swallowing. I can still talk, but it is getting more slurred all the time, and I have a hard time eating. The doctor says eventually it probably will progress to the rest of my body. There has been no help for this disease; but when I went to see the specialist...the first thing he said...was, "There's hope." They think they have a medication that helps it. It sure helps to have the support you give me, and finally I can say I want to stay here as long as the Lord wants me to. But what a hope it is to know there is a wonderful eternity to look forward to!" By August 25, 2003, she said that she can no longer speak. She said she was doing very well physically and had a machine to type "her thoughts" into and it would say what she

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## A Happy Birthday Surprise! By: Paul Gardner

They say a picture is worth a thousand words! As you can see from this cartoonish picture of me, I was indeed caught by surprise on my sixtieth birthday! That's because Jean Gonzalo, my sister, and my lady friends, Joyce, Carol and Hilda, did a great job of keeping me unaware that Jean had flown in from Bakersfield, California to help me celebrate. She stayed right through the Thanksgiving holiday which helped to make it the best birthday and Thanksgiving I've had in many a year.

After Jean had flown home, I thought about beginning the journey through my sixth decade. After all, Grandma and Grandpa Gardner were just five or six years older than I am now when my sisters and I went to live with them back in the early 1950s. We thought age 30 was really old then! Now, "old" is incrementally moved up five or more years from my current age.

First of all, I feel really lucky to have lived even this long! Many people in the world have died at a much younger age; never realizing their potential, their life's light snuffed out by disease, disaster, accidents, war, or violence. How fortunate for me, and for all of you reading this, that we have escaped these fates so far! The recent Tsunami tragedy dramatically shows how little control we really have over how long we live.

Next, I thought, "Well, here I am at age 60. I don't have to pursue a career path or study to



A very surprised Paul!

earn scholarly degrees. I don't need to impress anyone with special skills I may possess. I can look forward to retirement



From left to right: Hilda, Jean, Carol, Paul and Joyce

fairly secure in the fact that I'll have enough wherewithal to live comfortably." Even better, I have good friends and all of you, loyal readers, are a wonderful family, - literally and figuratively. So, where am I going? What's next? As the famous Peggy Lee song wails plaintively, "Is that all there is?"

Have you heard of the book entitled When Bad Things Happen to Good People? I haven't read it myself, but I've often thought about that universal theme - (as I'm sure

you have too) about how people are able to rise above adversity and go on without rancor or bitterness in spite of everything, - "Job style." (Remember him in the Bible?) The tribute to Aunt Nita written by Becky here in this issue is another example of this remarkable ability.

So, at age 60, I guess what I wanted to know was an answer to that question, "Is that all there is?" As if by magic I came across the answer when I stumbled upon some writings by Rosa Luxemburg. She was a

pacifist and revolutionary socialist repeatedly imprisoned and eventually murdered by forces of the German Right on January 15, 1919. This is what she wrote from her cell in Breslau Prison on December 17, 1918.

"I lie here alone and in silence, enveloped in the manifold black wrappings of darkness, tedium, unfreedom, and winter - and yet my heart beats with an immeasurable and incomprehensible inner joy, just as if I were moving in the brilliant sunshine across a flow-

ery meadow. And in the darkness I smile at life, as if I were the possessor of a charm which would enable me to transform all that is evil and tragical into serenity and happiness. But when I search my mind for the cause of this joy, I find there is no cause, and can only laugh at myself - *I believe that the key to the riddle is simply life itself*, this deep darkness of night is soft and beautiful as velvet, if only one looks at it in the right way. The grinding of the damp gravel beneath the slow and heavy tread of the prison guard is likewise a lovely little song of life - for one who has ears to hear."

So, to the Original Gang of Ten and their families and friends, to the Gardner cousins and their families and friends, and to all the Gardner in-laws and their families and friends, I make a toast - "to life" - no matter what decade we are beginning or ending!



Six candles for every ten years!

## The Miss Newport Diner Heads South to Massachusetts

By: **Scott Wheeler**

Reprinted from  
*The Kingdom Historical, December 2003*

She was only a little girl when her father helped bring something to town that over several decades would become somewhat of a historic landmark in Newport – the Miss Newport Diner. Winsom Hamilton of Derby Line remembers the diner arriving in the area, and more than 50 years later, on October 16, 2003, she was there to see it go.

“It’s very nostalgic, I don’t like to see it go,” Hamilton said as she watched the diner lifted aboard a flatbed truck on a rainy, windy day. “It’s like saying goodbye to a bygone era.” The diner had been located on East Main Street since it rolled into town.

Thinking back more than 50 years to when she was about four years old, Hamilton said that it was Noble Craft who originally brought the diner to Newport. Craft, along with Hamilton’s father, David Allen, decided Newport needed a new diner to feed the people of the then bustling railroad community. The two men didn’t want just any type of diner; they wanted one that would stand out from the rest of the diners in the Newport area. Once could easily speculate that in their planning, the two men decided on such a diner as the Miss Newport because it, as well as other similar diners, were fashioned to look like old railroad cars – and what better type of diner to have in a railroad community? With the march of time, memories of a four-year-old child have been dimmed with time, making it difficult for her to remember the exact year that the diner arrived in town. She seems to recall the year as 1947.

“My dad thought it would be a good idea,” Hamilton said. It was at a period in time when similar diners were springing up around Vermont and the rest of the United States. Most diners of this style were able to hold only about 30 people, but they proved popular gathering spots for the average person.

Over the years, the Miss Newport had many loyal customers. Some enjoyed a full meal, while others popped in each morning just to enjoy a cup of coffee and to catch up on the day’s news.



The Miss Newport Diner in happier times.

Thinking back to her early years, Hamilton reminisced about the many good times that the diner held for her. “It was a special place for me to spend time with my dad,” she said. “We’d go there and have breakfast together.” It was place you could go where you were more than a customer; you were also a friend. Many of the workers not only remembered you by name, but they also knew what you would likely order.

The diner passed through several hands since the day it rolled into Newport half a century ago. Until recently it was owned by Francine Cotnoir. Over the years, the diner had its loyal customers, some who remained loyal to the end. Hamilton said she hadn’t been in the diner for about five years.

Throughout the United States, small diners continue to struggle to survive. They face stiff competition from larger, newer eateries. Many of these diners have fallen victim to time and progress. When Mark Hayes, owner of Hayes Ford, recently bought the Miss Newport – which sat next to his auto dealership on East Main Street – he decided to sell the old diner to make room for additional parking space for his sales lot. He sold the trailer to Dave Pritchard of Salisbury, Massachusetts. Pritchard buys and sells diners.

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## An Example to live by *(continued)*

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wrote. She could no longer swallow and had a feeding tube. On March 29, 2004, she said the letter would be short because she didn't have enough energy to write. "My health has sure changed since my last letter. I am confined to home health carers with me all the time, day and night. My mind doesn't work that great and, physically, I don't do anything." She also talks about Jesus being her only hope and strength. For at least a year before she died, there were many times we thought she would die, many hospital stays, and eventually, she was brought to a nursing home, where she died. These letters made me realize just how much she suffered. I didn't really see her enough while she was sick to know just how much she

was suffering.

Aunt Nita is someone I will always look up to. She set a wonderful example, and I hope that I, as well as everyone who reads this, will always remember and follow it. That's how you'll have the best life possible. Aunt Nita lived her life to the fullest. She lived for God first, then others, then herself. That is why she enjoyed life so much — even through the hard times — and why she left such an impression on so many people. In the pamphlet for the funeral, there was a poem that explains just what happened.

*"God saw she was getting tired,  
And a cure was not to be;  
So he put His arms around her,  
And whispered "Come with me."  
With tearful eyes we watched her suffer,*

*And saw her fade away;  
Although we loved her dearly,  
We could not make her stay.  
A golden heart stopped beating,  
Hard working hands to rest;  
God broke our hearts to prove to us,  
He only takes the best."*

When I read that, I thought (as I cried), "Wow. That is so true!" None of us wanted to see her suffer anymore, but we didn't want her to go either. She was wonderful, and I guess that just proves "He only takes the best."



Don't forget to support Becky as she goes to Panama this summer!

Log onto [www.gardnernews.org](http://www.gardnernews.org) and surf over to Beulah's page to learn more!

**"Aunt Nita is someone I will always look up to. She set a wonderful example."**

## "I had mixed feelings about selling it."

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"I had mixed feelings about selling it," said Hayes, a man who loves history. But considering that his dealership needed room to expand, and it being difficult to make a profit from such a small

diner, he saw selling it to somebody such as Pritchard who would take good care of it, the best solution.

Many onlookers turned out on that October day to watch the Miss Newport roll out of town, carrying with it years of memories

from an earlier era when Newport was a busy railroad community. Doubtless it'll create 50 more years of memories for the people in the community in which it settles.



Another picture of The Miss Newport Diner on East Main Street in Newport, VT.



Len and Donna Griffes and Family

**We hope the Griffes' keep us posted on the outcome of the contest!**

11-13-04

Paul,

Becky and many of her classmates were asked to write an essay for Guideposts Magazine's Young Writer's Contest. We didn't know until today that Becky chose to write about Aunt Nita. She gave us permission to send this to you for the newsletter.

There are thousands of entries in the contest for 20 prizes ranging from \$250 to \$10,000. It would be so awesome if she won one of them.

Also, effective the middle of December, our address will change to: 227 Lane Road  
Newport, VT 05855

Our new house should be ready by then.

Sincerely,  
*Len & Donna*

## And ... from Roadside On-line at [www.btwmagazine.com](http://www.btwmagazine.com)

### Diners

#### Hail New England's new diner king!

**A** New Years Day call from Dave Pritchard brought us some pretty amazing news. Pritchard, a Salisbury, Massachusetts truck dealer who also owns three diners, just added two more to his collection. Already the owner of Chubby's, an O'Mahony in operation next to his dealership, he had also acquired the long-wandering **Englewood Diner** and the **Miss Newport Diner** in 2003.

In the past few months, he's added a former **Monarch Diner**, long closed and in storage in Sanford, Maine and the **Olympian Diner** which last operated in Braintree, Massachusetts.

If you ask Pritchard what he plans to do with all these diners, you won't likely get a solid answer. He's not yet sure. A self-proclaimed collector of stuff, he got bit by the bug a few years ago after buying Chubby's and leasing the operation to someone with real restaurant experience. In his purchase of the Monarch, Pritchard finally pried free a diner sought after by several prospective own-

ers. Owned by Phylis Neal who had planned to open it when she bought it eighteen years ago, she apparently relented to Pritchard's offer. Though he won't disclose the exact sum he paid, he tells us that the diner retains most of its original fixtures and furniture.

Pritchard tells Roadside, however, that he does plan to find a good home for at least one of his prizes. In the meantime, all four sit safely stored on his property.