

## REAL LIFE

TRUE TALES FROM EVERYDAY LIVING

## Racing, and recording, against time

BY LAURA MCCANDLISH  
[SUN REPORTER]

Four years after the death of my grandmother, and long after we scattered her ashes on the banks of the James River in Virginia, I take comfort in the fact that I can still hear her voice. Literally — thanks to the foresight of my grandfather.

There's Nonny urging the 5-year-old me to sing songs from Annie and asking what type of prince I'd like to marry. Nonny on why she smoked and why she quit. Nonny remembering her grandfather and her cousin, the actor Red Buttons. It's all on tape.

See, Poppy bought one of those reel-to-reel recorders in the early 1950s, and he's been interviewing and recording family members ever since. He switched to cassette tapes in the mid-1960s.

What motivated him? An urgent need to glean the family history from his aging mother, who grew up in a Polish shtetl and immigrated to Boston, before her memories were erased. He never had the chance with his father, who died during my grandfather's sophomore year of college.

He also had to capture the early perceptions of my mother when she was a toddler, and of her more reticent older brother. In her teenage years, my mother was embarrassed by Poppy's recordings. He had to grab her first thoughts when she burst into the car, after she spent a summer in France.

Then, after I was born, my mom was bitten by the recording bug, too. Now that my grandfather is 94, she pounces on his every word. When my two sisters and I are home for vacations, she pulls out a recorder. "Mom, can't we just live, in the moment?" we protest.

But, here I am. Now, I've fully joined this tribe of transcribers. I'm the first person in the family to build a career around this irrepressible tendency. It's in my blood. Journalism somehow makes sense.

On and off for close to 10 years, Nonny lay



PENELOPE DULLAGHAN [SPECIAL TO THE SUN]

bedridden, and most traces of lucid thought escaped her the year before she died. It was too late to quiz her about past loves and her psychic sense of past lives. And so, I turned the spotlight on my grandfather, as he approached his 90th birthday, providing him with a release from thoughts of his wife's imminent end.

The summer before my grandmother died, while I was home on a break from teaching, I started recording my grandfather, logging in obsessive hours every day. I frantically typed at the computer, keeping up as he narrated neat vignettes, punctuated with archaic language, into the whirling tape. Stories from his years as a doctor on Christmas Island during World War II, or making house calls to farms to visit polio patients, charging less than the other doctors in town, \$100 total for prenatal care and a baby's delivery. I prodded further. Out spilled anecdotes and his opinions on

abortion and adoption, and treating patients who were closeted homosexuals or chronically depressed.

This penchant for oral history, I've realized, is a way of trying to cheat death. There's something particularly Jewish about this form of storytelling, embraced by the Friedbergs on the maternal side of my family tree. It exalts the lives lived here on Earth, with curiosity and verve. It cuts straight to the difficult questions.

The dozens, perhaps hundreds, of cassettes — which my grandfather sloppily labeled in pencil on masking tape — now lie in scattered stacks. Some tapes are missing. Others don't match their cases. The few my mom recently mailed temporarily got lost at the post office. She was more than distraught.

As much as she loves the stories, my other grandmother, an Episcopalian, doesn't share this tendency to record, nor does my father, for that matter. Grandma McCandlish has mostly eluded my mom's attempts to interview her. It's a shame. We're missing some tall, ripe tales.

"I don't know that stuff," Grandma says. "You have to have an interest to know it."

It's a different story with my grandfather. He won't let me off the hook. Along the way, we discussed publishing a book of his medical memoirs. We've written about 70 pages so far. I've still got tapes to transcribe. Time is running out. The deadlines of daily journalism have kept me far busier than I expected. Mom wants the book finished in time for Poppy to experience it. I'm afraid it's too late.

But Poppy is thrilled that our countless recording sessions will at least get some mention in print.

"Good," he said over the phone, when I mentioned this piece. "I don't want this to all go up in flames."

laura.mccandlish@baltsun.com

To listen to some of Poppy's recordings, go to [baltimoresun.com/realife](http://baltimoresun.com/realife).

## Go ahead: Proudly wear that 'crowd police' badge



DEAR AMY // I'm undecided about what to do when at a free instructional meeting or lecture, a couple of people use the time to talk. They appear to think that because they talk in "low voices" it's OK.

Although I do have to strain to hear the speaker, it isn't that I can't hear, exactly, it's that the extracurricular talking is very distracting and annoying.

An occasional, short comment is not the problem for me, it's when the talking goes on and on that I want to pick up the nearest handout and bludgeon them. I don't want to be the "crowd police," but I know from comments afterward among other participants that I'm not the only one who feels this way. What's your take on this?

MAKES ME NUTS

DEAR NUTS // You place too little value on your time and attention, not to mention the time and attention of other courteous people — and the speaker that you have all come to hear.

There's nothing wrong with being the "crowd police." If people are carrying on a conversation during an event, impeding your ability to hear and enjoy it, then by all means place them under a citizen's arrest. Don't merely ask them to lower their voices. Say, "Would you mind not talking until this is over, please?"

DEAR AMY // I am an **TRIBUNE MEDIA SERVICES**

11-year-old girl with a friend problem.

A couple of months ago, I went to my friend's sleepover birthday party.

Everything was fine. But when I got home I noticed that my brand-new tank top was missing. I called my friend and e-mailed to ask if she had it. All of her answers were no.

A couple of days ago, I went to her house for a sleepover.

The next morning while she was still sleepy, I asked her if I could go to her room to change. When I got upstairs, I looked around to see if my shirt was lost in a corner. It wasn't. Then I looked in some of her drawers. I found an XS, worn-out, brown tank top. I knew it was mine because she doesn't wear XS and it was the same brand as mine.

I quickly changed and put it in my bag. But I didn't tell her.

Should I tell my friend or not? **WORRIED GIRL**

DEAR WORRIED // You shouldn't have gone into your friend's drawers looking for this item and then taken it. It was sneaky to do that, and even if your friend was a sneak, that doesn't mean that you get to be that way too.

You have to acknowledge that it is possible that this shirt wasn't even yours to take. You should e-mail your friend and say something like, "When I was at your house, I saw my brown tank top that I've been looking for, so I just brought it home with me. I hope that's OK."

You should be prepared, though. If your friend says, "That's not your tank top in the first place," then what are you going to do?

## FROM THE COVER

## Religion may delay sex

REIMER [From Page 1N]

sex until marriage.

"We see the generally protective effect of family religion, but also a link between higher family religion and reduced contraceptive use once those teens are sexually active."

It is just speculation, but it is likely that teens from strong religious families do not prepare for first sex because they don't allow themselves to think of themselves as *that kind of person* — the kind of person who would violate church teachings so strongly expressed in the home.

"If you show up with a condom, that shows that you planned for it," said Manlove, in an interview.

The fact that the protective nature of family religiosity was true for every group except blacks may, Manlove speculated, reflect additional pressures in the African-American community to become sexually active at a younger age.

"In that case, the family's religious activities aren't going to be enough. The teens will need reinforcement from other adults in the community," she said.

The other teens require additional messages, too, Manlove said. Parents and religious leaders have to "give a strong, clear message to abstain from sex, but they also need to have a back-up conversation.

"They have to say to their children that if you are going to engage in sex, you need to use protection the first time and every time. These are not mutually exclusive messages."

Teens from religious families may be delaying sex because of the values that are reinforced by their church and their church community.

But, Manlove suggested, the

simple fact that church presents a regular ritual, a regular activity, with friends and family may itself be part of the reason these young people are delaying first sex.

"Is it the values? Is it the activities? Is it the social network?" Manlove asked. "It might be a function of all those things."

"We have seen that even things like having dinner together is protective."

In other words, it may be God. Or it may be Fuddruckers. But it is certainly family.

susan.reimer@baltsun.com

To hear an audio clip of this column and others, go to [baltimoresun.com/reimer](http://baltimoresun.com/reimer).

## HOROSCOPE

**ARIES** // March 21-April 19 / You deepen your connection to the people you love, and also to the people you hardly know. It's your personal way of giving peace a chance. You're especially drawn to Leo people.

**TAURUS** // April 20-May 20 / Your self-image becomes entangled in other people's opinions. Try to separate who you are from how you're defined in your relationships. You're bigger than how one person sees you.

**GEMINI** // May 21-June 21 / The unknown is revealed, not through magic, but simply through the desire to know. This probably involves letting things unfold the way they are and not how you wished they'd be.

**CANCER** // June 22-July 22 / Maybe you don't need to look for love. Maybe love is already there and you

only need to let it happen. Examine what barriers you may have unconsciously put up to shield you.

**LEO** // July 23-Aug. 22 / You're safe. Your life is filled with benevolent authority figures. Some of them you don't know yet, but when you need them, they're there with the power to help out.

**VIRGO** // Aug. 23-Sept. 22 / You're presented with a choice. You can either feel right, or you can feel happy. There is something to learn either way. Observe the interesting difference between those two alternatives.

**LIBRA** // Sept. 23-Oct. 23 / You're having second thoughts about the very thing you were so certain of a few days ago. Social pressure is strong. You'll only be sorry about decisions you make to please pushy people.

**SCORPIO** // Oct. 24-Nov. 21 / Stress is caused by resisting where you are because you want to be somewhere else. Therefore, you can eliminate stress by accepting where you are. You're not behind or ahead. You're in the perfect place for this time.

**SAGITTARIUS** // Nov. 22-Dec. 21 / Your taste is excellent and only gets better as you experience cultural variety. Follow the music of your gypsy soul, especially if it means crossing a border or two.

**CAPRICORN** // Dec. 22-Jan. 19 / Are you getting the sneaking suspicion that a relationship is dysfunctional? Welcome to the club. Most relationships are flawed. It all boils down to what particular dysfunction is tolerable to you.

**AQUARIUS** // Jan. 20-Feb. 18 / The stars indicate that you're apprehensive about taking the next step in

your career. It turns out there's no right or wrong, only action and inaction. Also, your love life thrives when you take risks.

**PISCES** // Feb. 19-March 20 / You're a keen character judge now, and friends need your help — be honest, though it's not easy to do so in some cases. Playing matchmaker is lucky, too, especially if you're making your own match.

**IF TODAY IS YOUR BIRTHDAY** // You're mastering the laws of attraction in your financial life this year, drawing stellar opportunities through the next two months. When you don't need the deal, you nail it. Family makes you proud in December. Affection is lavished on you through spring. Wedding bells ring on foreign soil in June. Leo and Gemini people are passionately supportive.

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