

## My Friend Myrtle

First published February 18, 2016 in Newswest

On my street, in the early sixties, kids were always out playing on someone's lawn or driveway. We would be skipping or playing marbles, when suddenly someone would yell "Here comes Myrtle!" and a black shiny 1952 Buick would come trundling down the street .

Myrtle was an ancient little lady, so small she could hardly see over the steering wheel. As she drove past, the car looked as though it were guided by an invisible chauffeur. All we could see was a little hat jutting above the edge of the window.

A few years later Myrtle asked my dad if I would be interested in a part-time job. She lived in an enormous house near Hampton Park and being a widow for some time, was now nervous about being alone at night. The "work" involved going to her house after supper and staying overnight. The pay was more than generous, and I would have my own room and bathroom.

Naturally I accepted right away and started the next day. I was dazzled by her house with its Iranian rugs, mahogany furniture, marble fireplace and a highly polished grandmother clock. As we became better acquainted, I was even more impressed by her zany sense of humour and youthful outlook. She didn't seem like an old lady at all.

Myrtle was a heavy smoker and, being a cool and 'with it' teen, I smoked occasionally as well. We would watch TV together in the evening, and every so often a Craven A would fly across the room and hit me on the head. "Here kid, have a cigarette" she would cackle, and I would light up.

We stayed up to watch the late news every night, and when that was over, just past midnight, the broadcast day ended. Then, we'd switch on the radio.

Myrtle was particularly taken with one of the overnight radio hosts, and one night decided to send him a pizza. We had a large pepperoni delivered to us, paid for the pizza, tipped the driver well, and sent it on to the radio station with a note.

Shortly after, we heard "Thanks Auntie Myrtle for the pizza!" on the radio show. This became a regular event, and the old lady would laugh with delight to hear her name mentioned on the air.

Myrtle was very kind and generous. She loved to have my friends visit in the evening. One of the boys dropped in during the winter and she noticed that his jacket was rather thin.

"Get yourself down to the haberdashers on Wellington Street tomorrow, pick out a

winter jacket and tell them to send me the bill," she ordered. She made one phone call and sure enough, the next day he came by to show her the warm winter jacket she had given him.

Myrtle loved an audience, and told us stories of her earlier life with her husband and son, in their previous house on Aylmer Avenue. They often travelled by train in the days of porters and shoeshine service, and she enjoyed going back in time to tell us all the details of the fun vacations they shared.

Eventually Myrtle's declining health required that she have a full time nurse/companion. The lady who was hired was very surprised at the number of young people who continued dropping in to visit. Myrtle entertained her many friends all her life. To this day, there must be quite a few of us who drive by her house and smile at thoughts of the lovely old lady who used to live there, and continues to live in fond memories.