



## Franny and Bonnie

*Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies* (Psalm 103, NKJV).

**F**rances J. Worst. I Googled her name and selected the top entry. For a fee, a background check (including all arrest records) was only a click away. Even for free, however, I wouldn't have wasted my time. The file would be empty. I didn't check my own name, assuming my criminal record had been wiped clean. My lawless spate caught up with me back in 1965 out in the plains of western South Dakota.

Franny, my mother-in-law, never knew the tremors of being ordered to stand straight for a mug shot or the blackening for finger prints. She didn't know the fright of being pushed into a cell, the door clanging shut and the click of a lock. She was a good woman.

My shame has followed me for more than a half century. She would have never knowingly been involved in illegal activities. I was arrested for breaking a Green River ordinance: selling encyclopedias door-to-door without a license.

Franny was honest. She wouldn't have hid a briefcase in the bushes on seeing a patrol car in the distance. Caught empty-handed and red-faced, I went back and retrieved my briefcase, got in the back seat and was on the way to jail.

Born in 1915, Franny was just five years younger than Bonnie Parker. Like Franny, Bonnie was smart, pretty, a good student, and lived with her widowed mother. Franny went on to secretarial school, worked in a doctor's office and teamed up with Bill, who would own small grocery stores, later an insurance agency.

Bonnie dropped out of high school, married before age sixteen, separated from her husband, worked as a waitress and at age 19 teamed up with Clyde. On a May morning in 1934, Bonnie, 23, was shot dead (along with Clyde) on a country road in Bienville Parish, Louisiana.

Bonnie's is a household name. Not so Franny's. The few online records offer no more than her age and an outdated address.

Franny is now incarcerated at Edison Manor, surely not on death row, rather hospice. She's a trooper and just might make it to her next birthday on July 7.

But back in the day, Franny was an independent woman who wouldn't have put up with all the care and attention she's getting now. She is the mother of five children, one having died in infancy, the rest alive and well. My husband, the oldest, will be 80 on his next birthday.

Franny has been widowed since Bill died at 87 in 2003. Theirs was a traditional marriage in many ways, very different from ours. No fussin' and fightin' over every little thing from pronouncing a word or constructing a birdhouse to how to operate a vehicle (I'm a good driver; he is not).

But from John's memories, we laugh a lot harder and more frequently than they did, and we work and play much harder in our old age. Two very good and very different marriages.

But Franny and Bill (like John and I) had their carved-out roles. Bill was the breadwinner; she a stay-at-home mom who spent her spare hours in volunteer work. She was an adult Sunday school teacher while Bill headed home after the morning service to prepare a big dinner, all six seated around the noontime table. He served on the city council, she on the Ladies Aid Society.

Franny can still quote Bible verses and sing hymns by heart. And she has long been known for her quips and sense of humor, even in the throes of dementia. Recently, when John visited her, he came up behind her, holding his hands over her eyes:

*Who is this? Must be the second person of the Trinity—my son!* How they laughed. Tender mercies at age 104. □

—Ruth Tucker