

Recollections of Dorothy and her sisters

Laurie Teschner Adams, daughter of Mary Gill Teschner and J. Peter Teschner

Hello everyone, I am Dorothy's oldest niece, Laurie; my mom Mary Gill Teschner is Dorothy's youngest sister of four. (Also at this virtual memorial service are my brother Peter and his wife, Gloria; sister Amy and her husband Tony; and Kathy and her husband, Jim.)

I have a few, but very clear, memories of a time when all four sisters gathered; perhaps Dave and Gordi have more. Rosalee, the eldest; Margaret, called "Muggins;" Dorothy—fondly known as "Ducie" in the family; and my mom, "Mary Martha." Their very enterprising father, Gorda J. Gill, was a force to be reckoned with, including a big heart and often fiery Irish temper. Their mother Dorothy—from what I've been told, as she had passed away while my mom was in college—was the foundation of love and attentiveness to her girls, husband, her husband's customers, church, community and her garden behind the "brown bungalow," where the family lived most of their life together in Strawberry Point, Iowa.

Whenever I had a chance to draw recollections of Gill Iowa family life out of Ducie I was fascinated by how she digressed from her siblings in her lifelong interest in art and "her projects" that she said offered a diversion from the spirited arguments that prevailed in their home, especially among the like-tempered Gorda and Muggins. While my mom, Mary, would retreat to the bedroom to read or play for hours with her beloved paper dolls that mother Dorothy patiently cut out for her, Ducie would be outside exploring or creating artworks. She told me she longed to enter and create a world where art would be her constant companion. Obviously, she did that well.

Back to childhood memories ... I have a frame with the four girls' photos that Grandpa Gorda had in his office when I was young (left to right): Rosalee, Muggins, Ducie and my mom, Mary Martha.



The early memory I cherish most is when all four families were together—probably about 1960 before Rosalee’s untimely death from cancer in 1961 or 1962. We all went to the Backbone State Park sandy beach, rented the old-fashioned black-tire innertubes, swam as best we could (Roseanne—Rosalee’s daughter was a champ at age 5). That same trip, I think, Ducie and her sisters took us to the stream and set up a bench so they could cut each other’s hair—we have a picture of this, too (Ducie cutting my mom Mary’s hair, with my little brother Peter). They laughed together and even then I could tell how very familiar they were with each other—how close as sisters.



On other trips, we cousins shared sleeping quarters with lots of laughs, mischief from Dave, Gordi, Teddy and my brother Peter—sleeping bags and the “interesting” food we could only get at Ducie’s, like yogurt and artichokes (our own 1960s family was a meat, potatoes, Tang and Pop Tarts group). Once on each of these trips the “grown-ups” would get us a baby-sitter and go out to a mysterious destination—like a fancy restaurant, play or “night club.” I remember watching my mom and aunts put on lipstick and get dressed up; very glamorous.

But most of all I remember Ducie’s willingness, her eagerness, to be hands on with each of us—always coming up with art projects and supplies—sometimes out of nothing just from our backyard. Then she patiently and briefly gave us some initial guidance—and stepped back to let us just create. She smiled

and made eye contact and made us feel like real artists. She always claimed a spot for us to make art outside, if she could.

There was music everywhere in the home she and Marsh created. In later years, Gordi and his great rock band performed the music for Kevin's and my wedding—in 1976 in our Chicago suburb. One of the special recollections I have of that day—a week before Christmas—was that Ducie and Julie, a young girl at the time, built a “snow bride” on the lawn in front of our house.

Ducie brought “special” to every occasion, every visit—encouraging or inciting us to do something new or unique, usually outdoors. In later years I remember accompanying her along the road in Naples, Florida (where my folks had a winter place), where we gathered discarded Banyan branches and bark for her amazing fiber arts.

I remember being amazed to learn that up to just a few years ago Ducie was still hopping on her bike to travel around Worthington, and I love to think of her tooting around town that way.

She was an amazing aunt, person and artist, and I'm proud to have known her. I hope you all will think of her and her remarkable works from nature when you next enjoy the outdoors.