Love is Service
The Story of Josephine R. Flynn, M.D.
by Pippy Giuliano
EDITOR’S NOTE

The following story contains excerpts from the story of Josephine R. Flynn, M.D., who lived from 1907 to 2002. The excerpts have been edited for clarity only. The original story came from six hours of interviews conducted in a car while Josephine’s son Charles drove her from Palm Beach to her summer home in Annisquam, Gloucester, Massachusetts. Additional excerpts from these interviews can be found in Charles Giuliano’s book, Gloucester Poems: Nugents of Rockport sold locally in Gloucester, and available at the Sawyer Free Library.

ABOUT THE COVER PHOTO

The child in the front center of the cover photo is Josephine R. Flynn in 1910. This is the Nugent family at Beaver Dam Farm in Rockport. Back row: Left to right is James, Joseph, Jack, Charles, Robert, Frank, George, and William. Front row: Catherine, Josephine, Mary J., Julia, and Mary.
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BY PIPPY GIULIANO

Our mother, Josephine Rita Flynn, was born on the kitchen table, October 1, 1907, at 93 Maplewood Avenue in Gloucester, MA. She was born to Josephine M. Nugent and James F. Flynn. I refer to my mother as “Jo” and “Mom” in this story so as not to confuse her with my grandmother and five generations of Josephines.

Beaver Dam Farm

As a child, my mother Jo spent summers with her extended family at Beaver Dam Farm in Rockport. Experiences generated from this period and the influence of her colorful family were foundational to the woman she would become.

Jo: Beaver Dam was a three-story house with ten bedrooms. On the ground floor, there was the winter kitchen. The summer kitchen was the stone kitchen.

Many houses from the 1800s had both a winter and summer kitchen, with the winter kitchen contributing to keeping the house warm during the cold weather. The summer kitchen was used in warm weather so the heat from cooking would not stay trapped in the main house. The stone building on Nugent’s Stretch, Rte. 127 is what remains of the summer kitchen, formerly the Babson cooperage.

Jo: They had milking cows and would deliver the milk twice each day. I remember them scrubbing down the milk house. Everything had to be sterile. It was a working farm, and everyone did his or her chores. I was just a little girl, and my chores were playing and keeping out of trouble.
They cut their own hay for the winter, salt hay and regular hay. During the summer, they gave fodder (new mown hay), which was bright green, to the cows. Up in the woods, they had a pig farm in Dogtown Common with a bullpen and slopped their own pigs. They oversaw the mating of their cows.

Young Jo followed her Uncle Frank around the farm while he tended the animals. The seeds of her interest in medicine sprouted in the cow barn at Beaver Dam. Frank, her kind and gentle uncle, was her inspiration. He eventually became a veterinarian, and Jo, a medical doctor.

Jo: It was an open house (at Beaver Dam) all the time. Anyone could come and visit and stay as long as they wanted. When they came, everyone pitched in. If it was a man, he got into a pair of dungarees and went out haying in the morning. They didn’t let them milk the cows because they would be too slow. The women would make pies and cakes.

In those days, we washed clothes out in the backyard. We had galvanized tubs on a stand: one with soapy water and one with rinse water. They bought Soapine, a powdered soap, by the barrel. There was a washboard for scrubbing, and you had the clotheslines. You dumped
the water right over the lawn. There was no running water. It was well water. There was a pump in the kitchen. You kept a pitcher of water on the sink to prime the pump.

If you walked through the woodshed, you would then find an outhouse where there were five toilets lined up. Different sizes with small ones for the children. It was nothing to have them all occupied at once. Chatting away. Yes. That was a place to go. It was a different odor, not like bathrooms today. They put lye down the toilets. That took away the odor. The honey man would come every few months and dig it all out.

Saturday night we took baths. We washed our hands and feet every night in the kitchen. There were no showers, so we were lucky to get that bath each week. Grammy would go first. It would take a couple of people to lift those tubs and empty them in the sink. You boiled the water. The kids took turns and had a bath in the same water. It wasn’t that bad because we washed up every night.

Everyone would go to Gloucester on Saturday night. All the young people were standing on the street corner in front of the drugstore. We would do a little shopping. Be seen dressed up. That was a big adventure. There were open cars that would ride around the Cape. It would stop in front of the house. The seats would go all across. It was a thrill to go up to Gloucester in the open car.

In the 1920s, Grammy (Mary J. Nugent) moved to Mt. Vernon Street. That’s near Our Lady of Good Voyage church. She called it moving to the city. That’s when Georgie (Nugent) took over the farm and

My mom in the 1920s
got rid of it when he bought Shepherd’s Farm on the other side of the road from Beaver Dam.

Beaver Dam eventually burned to the ground sometime after the family abandoned the homestead. The stone kitchen remains a sentinel of former times.

**Wheeler’s Point**

Jo was a teenager when her family summered on Wheeler’s Point in Gloucester. Mary Delaney, who later became a teacher in Gloucester, directed the kids in a yearly play. They had dance parties every Saturday night, hanging Japanese lanterns and spreading Ivory Snow on the porch floor for easy gliding. The repertoire of songs included, *Yes! We Have No Bananas; It Aint’ Goin’ to Rain No More;* and *Ma, He’s Making Eyes at Me.* Jo recalled some of her friends: Fred Ellis, Eddy Sender, Fritz Ellis (later a coach at Tufts), and Arthur Haley, later a pharmacist.

Jo: *We had early morning walks. There was a rope tied around our ankles and dangling out the window. The first who woke up would make the rounds and pull the ropes. So, before anyone was up, we would get together and take a walk. We would walk out to Washington Street and back. That was a very adventurous thing to do. People we didn’t like, we wouldn’t pull their rope. They would get mad, and we would say, “Oh, was your rope out? Oh, we didn’t see it.”*

Like Beaver Dam Farm, it was always an open house on Wheeler’s Point for friends and relatives; the Reichenbachers and Louise Cusick from Rockport would visit or stay.

Jo: *Maude Henchcliff was my mother’s first cousin. She stayed for a number of years. Another friend was Helen “Nelly” White from Gloucester. Margaret Savage and Margaret Liberty also came from Gloucester. It seems Gloucester wasn’t that big, and Nelly White’s father was a sea captain. My mother and her friends from Gloucester looked each other up after they married and had families. They renewed friendships, and over the years, they became very warm and deep. Most of my mother’s friends were from way back in Gloucester. Mom’s friend Mrs. Goldberg liked the opera and symphony. In Boston, she often invited my mother to go with her.*
James F. Flynn – My Grandfather

To really know my mother, Jo, you have to know something about her mother and father. Our grandmother, Josephine M. Nugent, was introduced to James F. Flynn through her brothers, Robert and Charles Nugent. In 1898, James teamed up with the Nugent brothers, riding a tandem bicycle along the Charles River, winning the title of World’s One Mile Triple Champions—in one minute fifty-five seconds.

On my mother’s birth certificate, it states her father James’ profession was “Saloon Keeper”—owner of the hotel and tavern across from the Gloucester railway depot where the Rhumb Line now stands. Before saloon keeping, James worked the quarries of Lanesville as a blacksmith. His family had come down from Londonderry, New Hampshire, and settled in Bay View, a neighborhood north of Gloucester.

When James’ hotel and tavern burned to the ground, the Flynn family moved to 88 Gardner St., Allston - Boston.

Jo: The first bar he had was on Court Street, the Silver Dollar Bar. It was a men’s only bar. He was there a good number of years. That was during WWI, and then he had the Shubert Inn across from the Metropolitan Theater. Then he had the Hotel Osborne. That was at the corner of Shawmut Avenue and Tremont Street. He did most of the plumbing there himself. He just knew plumbing. He also operated The Cafe and Palm Gardens Restaurant at The Old Brigham’s, with dancing and a floorshow, at 642 Washington Street.

My father drove to Canada in a Pierce-Arrow (considered a luxury car similar to a Rolls-Royce). They would return with a load of whiskey, driving through Smuggler’s Notch in New Hampshire. The family business was running hotels, bars, and speakeasies.

My grandparents, Josephine M. Nugent and James F. Flynn
I was taking elocution lessons and needed the tuition. Whenever I needed money, I would visit Dad at his bar. He would send Opie (the bartender) out to make me a steak with fried onions, and oh, boy was that good. Then I had to stand up and recite for the people at the bar. Anything I knew, poetry or prose. I would get up there.

Jo recalled delivering booze to her father’s clients while in high school. “This is from Mr. Flynn,” she would say. He paid off the cops and remained open during Prohibition. Now and then, they would raid his place and smash beer barrels just for show.

**Medical School**

During the Depression, Jo’s father set aside enough to pay her tuition at Middlesex College of Medicine and Surgery, first located on Newbury St. and later sold to the founders of Brandeis University.

After graduating from medical school in 1932, Jo interned for $50 a month at Harbor Hospital on Coney Island in New York. When on-call, she slept in her uniform, “with one eye open with my foot on the floor,” as she had three minutes to answer the bell and hop onto the ambulance. There were drownings and mob executions on the waterfront and delivering babies in the home. Before heading back to the hospital, Jo, the ambulance driver, and the police officer who accompanied the ambulance would stop in Coney Island for cherrystones or a Nathan’s hot dog smothered in sauerkraut. Any case involving more than ten stitches required hospitalization; otherwise, procedures were performed on the scene. Her status as a woman doctor was fraught with difficulties that she experienced throughout her career.

Jo: *You had no privileges being a woman. They expected more of you. Because there was an antagonism about women. They were looking for a slip-up, a little something that you did.*

When pressed for more details from her days riding the ambulance, Mom admitted that the Mafia was involved in many calls to the
waterfront. “Oh yes, they used shotguns to blow heads off,” she said. When asked how she knew they were Mafia victims, she replied, “They usually vomited spaghetti.”

Dr. Charles Giuliano

While an intern at Harbor Hospital, my mother met her future husband, Dr. Charles Giuliano, a resident in surgery at Coney Island Hospital. She could not stand the arrogant young resident, so much so, she refused to bring him cases and had her ambulance divert patients to other hospitals. Charles serenaded her with *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling* on his ukulele and requested her assistance on house calls to perform tonsillectomies. The house calls were sometimes followed by dinner and a movie. After one such outing, Charles asked if she knew what he had in the trunk of his car. When he declared it was the suit he would wear to marry her, she was none too pleased. At this point, they were not on a first-name basis.

Despite her initial resistance, Mom and Dad were married in 1932, within three months of their courtship. The honeymoon was a weekend in the Catskills, then back to the hospital dormitory for my mother. My father went home to his Sicilian family in Brooklyn. After remaining separated for several months, they rented an apartment on Clinton St. in Brooklyn, where my mother established a small practice, administered a home office, and raised her daughter Josephine and son Charles.

During the war years, an opportunity arose for my mother to be closer to her family in Massachusetts and to take over the practice of her friend Dr. Robert Fulton Carmody in Brookline. After a year or so, Dad reunited with the family giving up a staff position at Bellevue Hospital.
In the 1940s, the Flynn/Giuliano family summered at Red Gates on Coggeshall Road in Lanesville. Longing to return to her roots, Jo purchased property in Annisquam. In 1948, they built a summerhouse in time for my birth.

**Dr. Josephine R. Flynn**

Mom was a general practitioner, sometimes referred to as a family physician. The first floor of our thirteen-room townhouse at 1760 Beacon St. in Brookline was the base of operations. She had a secretary/receptionist who kept records and collected the three-dollar fee for the first-come, first-serve office visit. Not all patients were able to pay. Mom had some pretty, down-and-out individuals, mostly alcoholics who came for a B-12 booster and some tough love. There were also the slick, smooth-talking drug salesmen who came to promote and unload their samples. The two waiting rooms were filled with young families whose children she delivered and older folks who could make it by trolley to the office. She administered every medical intervention—from cradle to grave—to a devoted following.

I got to know her patients quite well as it was my mission to entertain them with my puppets while they waited their turn. Often, I was invited into the office to witness the lancing of boils, bones set in plaster casts, ears pierced, immunizations, throats cultured, and the occasional circumcision. It was interesting to observe that some babies cried their eyes out while some were passive. My duty as an assistant was to clean the lavatory on occasion.

Mom was a bit of a scientist as she processed blood and urine in her laboratory in the butler’s pantry adjoining the office. To determine a diagnosis, she examined slides under the microscope. A large room down the hall from her office was the x-ray room with a full-length x-ray table. Mom processed the films in the adjacent darkroom. When not in use, the x-ray table was the perfect length and height for wrapping Christmas presents.
Every Wednesday was my mother’s day off from practice. On those days, she attended seminars and courses for accreditation. She often found herself alone at medical conventions. Fellow doctors snubbed her. As a woman doctor, she bore that rejection throughout her career. Dr. Louis Wolfe, a general practitioner from Watertown, was her one great friend and companion.

Dr. Wolfe and Mom collaborated in the study of cardiology. They attended seminars together at Beth Israel Hospital. They analyzed reams of cardiogram strips—reading the peaks and valleys like some hieroglyphics. Mom became very good at interpreting cardiograms, and an EKG machine soon took its place alongside the other office equipment. Mom was always studying. Medical journals were her nighttime reading, while paperback westerns cluttered Dad’s nightstand.

Mom made house calls every morning for patients too sick or old to come to the office. Towards the end of her career, she charged seven dollars for a home visit. She remained as long as the patient needed; sometimes she was treated to a piece of homemade pie. In good weather, our dog Donner (a Weimaraner) accompanied Mom on calls. For a treat, Mom would stop at Morgan’s and buy Donner her favorite flavor ice cream cone. Mom would hold it while Donner’s tongue swirled around the cone. They would hurry home for afternoon office hours starting at 1:30 PM. Sometimes Donner was invited into the office.

True to her motto, “Love is service,” Mom also served the wider community as an officer in the Brookline chapter of the American Medical Association. She also served as an elected official on the Brookline Town Council.

**Palm Beach**

At ages 65 and 72, Jo and Charles retired from practice and began a new life in Palm Beach, Florida. Their friends and neighbors from Annisquam, Nate and Helen Ross, soon joined them in the unit next door. Jo didn’t miss a beat. She enjoyed the theater, opera, the Four Arts Museum, luncheons, and cocktail parties. Just down the street, Jo explored artmaking at the Lake Worth Art Center. She dabbled in jewelry making, enameling, learning decoupage, and finally discovered her passion for oil painting.
In the summer months, Jo continued to study painting with prominent Gloucester artists: Marian Williams Steele, Robert Benham, Helen Van Wyk, and her longtime friend, Bernie Gerstner. She soaked up all she could going to demonstrations and lectures. Jo made color charts, took photos of scenes, and painted en plein air. By summer’s end, she had a stack of unfinished paintings that she continued to work on at the little community studio in Florida. Her style was energetic and colorful in an expression uniquely her own. Jo was a prolific painter who gave away her framed paintings to family and friends. Some of those paintings have landed in local second-hand shops. One shop owner told me that my mother’s work is highly collectible and that she has a following.

Our mother never considered herself exceptional or took credit for her achievements. Though it was unusual at that time for a young woman to pursue a medical career, she never considered herself a pioneer—least of all, a feminist. She was attractive and dressed well in Bonwit Teller suits with matching hats. Those were her only flourishes. She was a straight arrow—a tell-it-like-it-is kind of person; a dedicated physician who ran her practice as a business. Out of practicality, she lived upstairs from the office in that “ark” of a house, which she often lamented, was not a real home.
That is why Annisquam was so important to her. She would retreat for the weekend, don a flannel shirt, stoke the fire, and make a batch of penuche, her favorite fudge-like Italian candy. Mom was in her glory, roughing it on a fall weekend. Lest we forget, a medical emergency was always a phone call away, but in Annisquam, Jo was in her element.

Josephine R. Flynn, M.D. was a role model to an extended family that regarded her affectionately as “the Chief.” She was known for her sharp wit, sound advice, and inventive use of language. Below is an example of her advice to her son Charles recorded on tape:

Jo: You’ve got to keep busy, kid. That’s what keeps you young and alive. Don’t sit around and feel sorry for yourself. Get up and do something. Make a contribution. Love is service.
AUTHOR’S AFTERWORD

Gloucester is in my blood and in my heart. My great-grandfather, Patrick Nugent left County Waterford, Ireland for Boston. In 1875, Patrick was employed to oversee a fish-head drying operation at the Rockport farm purchased from Dr. J.J. Manning. With the help of matriarch, Mary (Donovan) and thirteen children, Patrick rented pasturelands, raised a herd of cows and cultivated the land bordering Dogtown. The family occupied Beaver Dam Farm for forty years. Only the stone summer kitchen remains. Built in 1832, it was the site of the first American cooperage owned by the Babson family.

My Sicilian roots have no direct connection to Gloucester but my ancestors are here in the faces of fishermen, in the aroma of espresso, and in a cassata venerated on special occasions.

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I would like to thank my big brother Charles Giuliano for understanding the importance of family history, for probing those important questions and for setting the stage for hours of interviews in which our mother was comfortable revealing some skeletons from the closet. Thanks Charles for encouraging my attempts at writing.