EVA TANGUAY (1896—1982)

“She was a spitfire, and a little ornery. She used to flit around a lot. She was here, there and everywhere. Because she was the oldest girl, she had to do all the chores, and she was the one who had to take care of all her brothers and sisters when she was growing up. Maybe that’s why she never seemed to like children. Some women adore kids, but she wasn’t like that.” ~ Eva’s niece, Carol Frye

FOUR MONTHS AFTER EVA TANGUAY POSED FOR LEWIS HINE

From the late 1800s to the early 1900s, waves of French Canadians traded the farms and fields of Quebec for the noisy, lint-filled brick cathedrals of the Industrial Revolution in New England. But Eva’s father, Joseph Tanguay, was a carpenter, a trade that would have afforded him a relatively comfortable standard of living in America. In 1894, at the age of 27, he married 19-year-old Roseanna Lathose in Ste. Sophie d’Haldim. A year later, they moved to Manchester, New Hampshire, where their first child, Eva Aucild Tanguay, was born on October 10, 1896. They were to have at least 11 more children, two of whom died in 1903 and 1904, at ages three and four.

By 1900, they had moved to Lawrence, where they lived in a tenement at 64 South Broadway, near the Merrimac River and the great expanse of chugging, smoking textile mills that dominated the city. By 1910, Mr. Tanguay had built his own house at 61 Sylvester Street, more than two miles from the mills. Eva would turn 14 in October, making her the youngest worker of those photographed by Lewis Hine, a major strike broke out against the Lawrence mills. It would have most assuredly turned her life upside down. She was probably working on the day the strike began, and was swept up in the chaos of the moment. But starting the following day, her family might have kept her safely away from the violence and the tumultuous events that played out day by day, until the strike ended two months later with a historic victory for the millworkers. Seventy years later, Eva passed away at the age of 85, having faced this and many other difficult and life-changing challenges with an audacious and independent spirit.

By 1911, Eva’s brother Joseph was born, and her family named him in honor of the shipyard where their father worked. In 1922, her father died, and her mother moved to Manchester with her five children. In 1924, Eva married Robert Raymond Dibbert, who also worked at the Navy Yard. They moved to Berkeley, California the same year. Robert died in 1945, but Eva remained in California until her death in 1982.

EXCERPTS FROM MY INTERVIEW WITH NIECE CAROL FRYE:

“I was born in 1941. My mother was Eva’s daughter, Eva Ruth Holdsworth, but she went by Ruth. When I was young, we lived in Lawrence, at 209 Andover Street. But I have lived in Michigan for many years now.”

“The last time I saw Grandma was about 1980. She was quite a stinker. She always had a cigarette in her mouth. She loved to gamble. She was just full of the devil. We took our kids out to California in 1980. We visited my sister and her husband. Our son Todd was about 11 years old. We spent some time with Grandma. One day we went to the zoo. We walked past the chimpanzee cages, and one of them was shaking the cage like crazy. All of a sudden, he pooped in his hand and threw it at Grandma. And she said to Todd, ‘Dame it, Pat it! And throw it right back at him.’ Things would come out of her mouth that were hilarious.”

“She was a wonderful seamstress. I got married in 1960, and she came to Michigan to make my bridesmaid dresses. When she moved out to California, she worked in a bridal shop, and she sewed on all those tiny sequins and beads on wedding dresses.”

“Eva Tanguay married Frederick Holdsworth in 1916. She was 19 and he was 30. He was a machinist for the Boston & Maine Railroad. They rented a house at 322 South Broadway, in Lawrence. By 1930, they were living in a crowded, stuffy car to and from work. Leaves home at 6 A.M. and returns at 6:30 P.M. The doughing work is standing and riding—bad for an adolescent girl. Father is a carpenter. Elder brother is 11 years old, her sister Muriel in middle of front row said she was 11 years old but I doubt it. Eva is on left end of front row. Said she was 14 but did look 15. Location: Lawrence, Massachusetts, September 1911.

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“It is unlikely that Eva Tanguay remembered being photographed by Lewis Hine; but if she did, she probably attached no significance to it. But she would have remembered what came to be called the ‘Bread & Roses Strik’... She probably would have heard or read at some point in her life about its historical importance. If she returned to work at the Ayer Mill after the strike ended, her wages would have increased, thanks to the courage of her co-workers, mostly women. Whatever role she played, however small, she made history, and thanks to Lewis Hine, we are now witness to that fact.”

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